

## **1.0 Introduction**

Keith Woods' eight grade graduation from the Salmon Prairie School was well attended, despite the fact that he was literally "in a class by himself" (Jamison, 2010). For that matter, he was also in a school by himself, the lone student in a one room schoolhouse, built in 1920, in the deep woods surrounded by the peaks of the Bob Marshall and Mission Mountain wilderness areas. Keith, who had moved from town to town and state to state as a young boy, says "*This is the greatest school I've even been to*" (Jamison, 2010, pg. 2).

Two years ago, a local newspaper showcased a Christmas production put on at the school, in which Keith, one other student, and the principal shared responsibility for a production that had seven characters (Jamison, 2008). The reporter noted that the size of the student body at Salmon Prairie fluctuates with the health of the timber industry. Currently, this industry is in trouble, and the future of Salmon Prairie is uncertain.

While this one-room schoolhouse story may sound like an interesting remnant of earlier times, the fact is that extremely small schools are very prevalent in Montana. In these schools, multi-grade classes are not an innovation, they are a necessity (Miller, 1989). Many Montana educators are truly "out there" in remote settings without access to the breadth of expertise that comes with a larger faculty, nor the personnel with specialized skills to address learning differences that are available in larger districts.

Despite these challenges, there are lessons to be learned from small schools about meeting the needs of heterogeneous groups of students. Salmon Prairie's outcomes speak volumes. In the past five years, not one of the thirty students given the state's standardized tests has scored below

grade level. Twenty-six of the students scored in the advanced range, 87% of the students, tested well above their grade level (Jamison, 2010).

What strategies produce those outcomes? The reporter provided a glimpse of Hal Hubbard's teaching methods in his description of a typical morning at the school.

*Every morning, rain, snow or shine, Hubbard and his students take a morning walk through the woods to start the day. Sometimes, they make it an art outing, and bring the watercolors. Sometimes, they collect plants for science class. Sometimes, they just get the blood pumping and call it physical education. Sometimes they snowshoe out and build a fire, and sit around it to read quietly for an hour* (Jamison, 2010, pg. 3).

Moving beyond the initial reaction that instruction like this couldn't possibly exist in more traditional school settings, an objective analysis of the practices in use provide some important insights. Viewed from a pedagogical perspective, teachers in very small schools adopt many of the very evidence-based practices recommended by experts to meet the needs of diverse learners in "traditional" school settings (Rutherford, 2002; Vaughn, Bos & Schumm, 2007). They include: Use of flexible groupings for instruction (Schumm et al., 2000; Vaughn et al., 2003); differentiated instruction (e.g., Tomlinson, 1995, 2003); peer tutoring (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2000; Harper & Maheady, 2007); establishing a learning community that fosters belonging for all (Schaps, 2005; Schaps et al., 2003); interest-based learning (Hidi, 1990); use of multiple abilities tasks (Cohen, 1994); activity-based instruction (Mastropieri et al., 2006); authentic assessment (Wiggins, 1993); learner-centered practices (Cornelius-White, 2007); and family and community support (Comer, 1996, 2006), to name but a few.

While the small, idyllic setting of Salmon Prairie is not possible to widely replicate, it is possible to support the adoption of a set of responsive educational practices that foster success for all students in schools throughout Montana. Salmon Prairie provides a tangible vision of what is possible in Montana schools: Responsive Education for All Learners (REAL).

## **2.0. Need for Project**

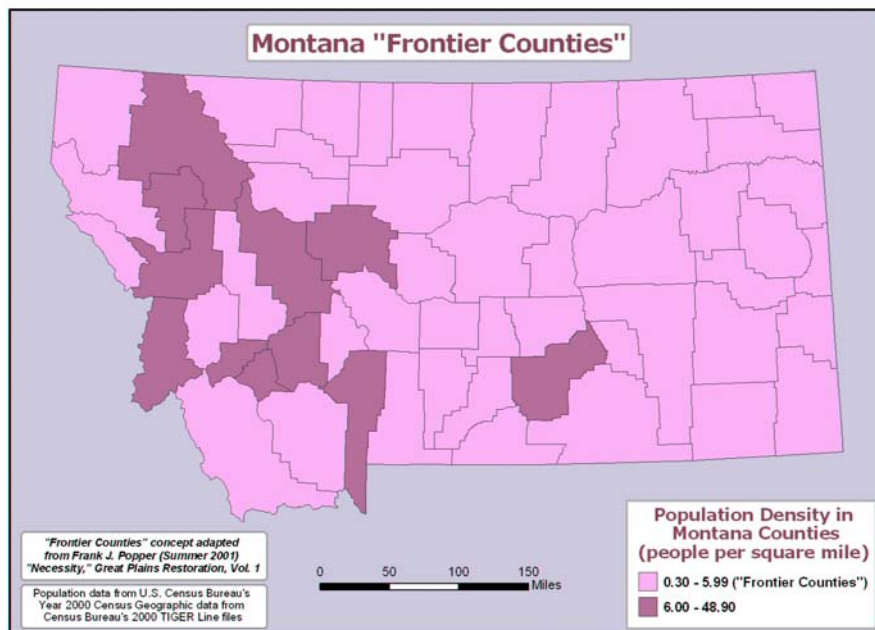
Project REAL was designed with the support and involvement of a diverse network of stakeholders. (See Appendix A for letters of support from stakeholders, and Appendix C for details about the constituencies represented in these groups.) In this state, working with stakeholder groups is not just something done to give the appearance of collaboration. The Office of Public Instruction (OPI) depends upon the active participation of practitioners, school administrators, and parents to do important work, fiscally supporting their participation in work groups, councils, and committees.

The data and perspectives gained from these activities are grounded in the collective wisdom derived from the professional literature about evidence-based models and interventions that are responsive to the needs of a heterogeneous student body. Within this context, students who need high levels of support (i.e., Competitive Priority 3) have remained in the forefront as a coordinated set of professional development activities, focused on student, parent, classroom, school, and district level improvement initiatives, have been designed. This information is viewed and interpreted through the distinctive lens of a rural system of education. The unique and challenging intersection of these areas of focus is visually depicted in Figure 1.

**2.1 Examining the Current State Context.** Establishing the “fit” between Project REAL and the needs of Montana schools begins with a consideration of the demographics and geography of the state. Several maps are provided in Appendix D to visually communicate what is described in this section.

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If Montana's residents were distributed evenly across the state's 147,046 square miles, there would be six people per square mile. Only one of the six would be a K-12 student (CEIC, 2010b). In reality, approximately half the population live in large towns or cities. It is worth noting, however, that Billings, the largest city in the state, just approaches 100,000 in population. Bozeman, the fourth largest city, has approximately 33,535 residents (InfoPlease, 2010). The other half of the state's residents live in small towns and rural communities of less than 2,500 people. Forty-seven of Montana's 56 counties meet Popper's (1986) definition of "the American frontier" (i.e., counties with fewer than six persons per square mile). A map in Figure 2 illustrates the location of these counties. In-state travel is an important variable in the delivery of professional development and technical assistance activities. Flight options are extremely limited. The discontinuation of federal subsidies



**Figure 2. Map of Montana's Frontier Counties**

for small commuter airlines has caused them to fold. The end result is that if you want to fly to Billings from Missoula, you must fly to Seattle, Denver, or Minneapolis first. The six hour drive from Missoula to Billings means that you have covered just half the width of the state, which is 570 miles from East to West, and 315 miles at the most extreme North-South border (City-data, 2010). During a drive from Missoula to Billings, you go over three mountain passes which can be challenging when the weather conditions are inclement. Attendance at statewide professional conferences, which are always scheduled in October and April, is still occasionally impacted by winter weather conditions.

Economic Environment. Economically, Montana ranks 39<sup>th</sup> in state per capita personal income (PCPI). In 2008, the state's PCPI was \$34,622. This is 86% of the national average, \$40,166. The median household income is \$43,654, while the median family income is \$56,820 (CEIC, 2010a). Fifteen percent of the state's population is living in poverty. Montana ranks 29<sup>th</sup> in terms of the number of children aged 5-17 who are living in poverty (US Census, 2007). Slightly over 16% of the population does not have health insurance (CEIC, 2010b).

In this economic environment, teacher salaries are, predictably, low. Based on data compiled by the National Education Association for the 2007-08 school year, Montana ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in terms of its average salary for a teacher (NEA, 2010). The average starting salary for teachers in this state is \$25,318 (Teacher Portal, 2010).

Public Schools and Student Populations. A unique network of rural public schools exists in this state. Enrollment data for the 2008-09 school year indicate that approximately 142,000 students are served in 829 schools located in 417 districts (OPI, 2009a). As illustrated in Table 1, 69% of the

student population attend schools with less than 500 students; 29% attend schools with less than 250 students.

**Table 1. School Size and Enrollment in Montana, 2008-2009 (OPI, 2009)**

<b>School Size</b>	<b># of Schools</b>	<b>% of Schools</b>	<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>% of Enrollment</b>
>500	50	6%	43,977	31%
250-499	160	19%	55,409	39%
100-249	161	19%	26,268	18%
50-99	122	15%	8,822	6%
<50	336	41%	7,606	5%
	<b>829</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>142,082</b>	<b>100%</b>

Approximately 12% of Montana's school age population receives special education services under IDEA, Part B. The disability categories do not lend themselves to a precise identification of those students with the highest level of support needs targeted for Competitive Priority 3. The shaded rows in Table 2 highlight those groups in which these students are likely to be found. In the category of cognitive delay, for example, students who need high levels of support would be that proportion of students with the most significant levels of delay, which has been estimated to be about 3% (Sontag, Smith & Sailor, 1977). In this proposal, the term "low incidence" is used interchangeably with the phrase "students who need high levels of support." The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) defines children with low incidence disabilities, as: students with visual impairments, hearing impairments, simultaneous vision and hearing impairments, autism, and traumatic brain injury (OSEP, 2010).

**Table 2. Montana Students Served under Part B By Disability, 2008-09**

<b>Students Served in Part B</b>			
<b>Disability</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Disability</b>	<b>Number</b>
Autism	531	Multiple Disabilities	539
Cognitive Delay	976	Orthopedic Impairment	67
Deaf-Blindness	6	Other Health Impaired	1,738
Developmental Delay	701	Speech/Language Impairment	4,326
Emotional Disturbance	889	Traumatic Brain Injury	58
Hearing Impairment	147	Visual Impairment	51
Learning Disability	7,078		
<b>Total Students .. 17,107</b>			

Students under the age of 3 are served by the Part C program administered by the Developmental Disabilities Division of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services. Since the disability labels used for Part B are not used for these children (Shackelford, 2006), the population served is described by age. Part C currently provides services to approximately 649 children (Maloney, personal communication).



**Table 3. Montana Children Served under Part C By Age (Fall, 2009) (DDP, 2010)**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number</b>
Birth to 12 months	109
1 year	212
2 years	328
<b>Total 0-2 years .....649</b>	

A majority of students with disabilities attend their home schools in their home communities. As illustrated in Table 4, over half of students with disabilities spend more than 80% of the day in the general education class. Other program and placement options are extremely limited. The only segregated public school in the state is the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind. (MSDB).

**Table 4: Education Placement (Setting) Data for Students with Disabilities**

<b>Educational Placement: School Age</b>		<b>Educational Placement: Preschool</b>	
<b>Setting</b>	<b>Number (%)</b>	<b>Setting</b>	<b>Number (Percent)</b>
Reg class >= 80% of the day	7,961 (52%)	Separate Setting	656 (38%)
Reg class 40-70% of the day	5,342 (35%)	Regular Preschool	1066 (62%)
Reg class <40% of the day	1,715 (11%)		
Separate facility	401 (3%)		
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,419 (100%)</b>		<b>1,722 (100%)</b>

Twenty -one special education cooperatives support local districts in their efforts to provide special education services. The services most frequently available through cooperatives are related services. However, in the most rural areas of the state, cooperatives employ itinerant special

education teachers who serve multiple small schools, serving as a consultant to the general education teacher. (See Map in Appendix D).

**2.2 Personnel Development Infrastructure.** The infrastructure of Montana's personnel development system is briefly described in this section. Those entities involved in preservice preparation, as well as technical assistance and professional development activities are identified.

Teacher Training. There are two major university systems in the state: The University of Montana (UMT) and Montana State University (MSU). Both offer teacher training programs for general educators at the undergraduate and graduate levels, and have campuses in several locations. The MSU campus in Billings (MSU-B) offers coursework in special education at the bachelor's and master's level, while the UMT-Missoula campus offers an endorsement in special education that can be earned at the undergraduate or graduate level, as well as graduate coursework in special education that can be an identified area of concentration in a master's degree.

University-Based Centers. Both university systems have a center on campus focused on the needs of individuals with disabilities. The Rural Institute (RI), located at the UMT, is the state's university center for excellence, funded by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. Established in 1978 on the UMT campus, this organization is highly visible in the areas of interdisciplinary training, information dissemination, research, and community services. Staff of the RI are engaged in a wide range of grant-funded activities that address the needs of individuals with disabilities across the life span, as well as their families and service providers. The Montana Center on Disabilities, a public service unit of MSU-Billings, collaborates with campus, regional, state, and

national programs in support of increasing the number of leaders with disabilities. Like the RI, the Montana Center is an umbrella organization housing a number of grant-funded projects.

Regional Professional Development Infrastructure. Given the size of school districts in Montana, there are very few that are able to support personnel whose major responsibility is professional development. As a result, a strong regional system, initially established as a result of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) requirements in IDEA (Fishbaugh, Christensen & Bailey, 1995), is the infrastructure that supports a majority of the professional development activities supported with state and federal funds. The structure of these 5 regions is used for planning and administrative purposes across the state education agency and the Department of Public Health and Human Services. A map depicting the boundaries of the 5 regions is contained in Appendix D. Demographic information about the regions is provided in Appendix E.

Funded with IDEA dollars, the Division of Special Education has supported the continued growth and development of 5 regional CSPD Councils since 1993. In recent years, the regional CSPD personnel have aligned their efforts with the Regional Service Agencies (RSA) funded with ESEA Title II dollars, forming a joint coordinating group. ESEA Title II dollars support statewide activities implemented through this regional structure. In addition, project-specific funding, supported by sources such as Indian Education for All and ESEA Title II Part D dollars, are implemented through these regional groups. The overlap in membership between the RSA and Regional CSPD Councils supports the integration of professional development efforts.

Preschool Infrastructure. At the early childhood level, there are several groups that deal with service issues, including professional development, located within various Divisions within the

Department of Public Health and Human Services. Within the Division of Developmental Disabilities, the Family Support Services Advisory Council is the group established to oversee issues related to the implementation of Part C services (infants and toddlers). The Montana Early Childhood Advisory Council provides input to those within the Early Childhood Services Bureau. Representatives from a full range of stakeholder groups are members of the Early Childhood Partnership for Professional Development (ECPPD), a subcommittee of the state CSPD. See member list in Appendix C.

Support to Parents. There are two statewide parent resource centers in Montana. Parent's Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK) is the OSEP-funded parent training and information center. Located in Billings, it is a well recognized source of information and support for parents whose children have disabilities. A network of regional boards help support the work of parent representatives at the local level. The Parent Information and Resource Center (PIRC), located in Missoula, is funded as part of a discretionary grant program of the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement. With a mission that encompasses all families, the authorizing legislation (ESEA, Sec. 5563) requires those receiving PIRC funds to use half of their funds to serve areas with high concentrations of low-income children, and at least 30% of their funds for early childhood parent programs. The Montana PIRC provides information and technical assistance activities designed to improve student academic achievement, including understanding data from the state and local NCLB accountability system.

Low Incidence Supports. In addition to serving a small residential population, the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB) supports a network of Outreach Consultants in Hearing and

Vision who provide itinerant support for students with sensory impairments in their home communities. Half of the consultants have specialized expertise in the area of deafness/hard of hearing, while the other half support students who have visual limitations. These consultants work in collaboration with the Montana Deaf-Blind Project, the only other established program focused exclusively on students who need high levels of support. This year, the OPI has funded a pilot project in response to the rapidly growing population of students with a label of autism (Doty, 2010), and is supporting the use of Rethink Autism, a web-based resource to assist teachers in designing curriculum utilizing applied behavior analysis intervention strategies, in 10 districts.

### **2.3 Identification of Gaps or Weaknesses in Services, Infrastructure, and Opportunities.**

Stakeholder groups that have shaped the content of this project have spent considerable time reviewing state performance data and other relevant information. This occurred in multiple ways throughout the school year preceding the writing of this proposal. An April joint meeting of the state Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Council (CSPD), the Family Support Services Advisory Council and the State Special Education Advisory Panel was held to review data from Montana's Annual Performance Report (APR), identify existing activities that represent improvement strategies, better align other activities, and prioritize future activities to address identified needs. Regional CSPD Council chairs, who have monthly conference calls, have been discussing the new grant application on every call.

Key information that has led to the identification of gaps and weaknesses in Montana's infrastructure is summarized in the remainder of this section. It is divided into two sections, with multiple areas of performance addressed within each. The first section contains a reporting and

analysis of state performance data in the context of the professional literature. The second section discusses needs that emerge from a critical review of current professional development efforts and infrastructure.

### **2.3.1 Review of State Data and Associated Professional Literature**

Academic Performance: K-12 Students. At no time in the education of students with disabilities has there been greater emphasis placed on their academic success and the use of research-based practices to achieve this outcome. The inclusion of students with disabilities in the standards-based reform model embodied by NCLB (Thurlow, 2002), as well as the strong language in IDEA about access to the general education curriculum (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2005), has created accountability for student results at the state, district, and school levels.

Indicator 3 in the SPP addresses the performance of students with disabilities on the statewide assessment. Information about proficiency rates demonstrated by students with disabilities, as compared to peers without disabilities, is provided in Table 5. The largest discrepancies in performance between “all students” and specific subgroups are seen for students with disabilities, students for whom English is a second language, and students who are American Indian. At the state level, Montana’s has been “identified for improvement” for 6 years for performance in math and reading.

**Table 5. Reading & Math Performance of Students with and without Disabilities, 2008-09**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Reading</b>	<b>Math</b>
All Students	82%	64%
White	86%	68%
Black	81%	56%
Hispanic	77%	54%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	88%	75%
<b>American Indian/Alaskan Native</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>38%</b>
Asian	87%	78%
Economically Disadvantaged	72%	51%
<b>Limited English Proficient</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>21%</b>
<b>Students with Disabilities</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>28%</b>

These outcomes speak volumes. School improvement advocates talk about attending to the margins (Dei et al., 2000), focusing on the needs of students who have traditionally been separated out into special programs; unlabeled yet unsuccessful students in the regular classroom; students who come from families that do not speak English; and high performing students who push the margins in the other direction. *“These students constantly challenge the equilibrium and boundaries*

*of the classroom, and their diversity calls out for the school to change. They are the engines of reform”* (Burrello, Lashley & Beatty, 2001, pg. 2).

The impact of students with disabilities on the AYP status of Local Education Agencies (LEA) is another set of data tracked relative to Indicator 3. In Montana, the small school size clearly affects this analysis, since many schools have too few students with disabilities to be able to disaggregate results based on this factor. Examining the data for the past four years (see Table 6), it should be noted that Montana was required to change the size of its subgroup for the purposes of this analysis from 40 to 30 during the 2007-08 school year. Differences across time and states in defining the minimum number of students who can constitute a subgroup that can be disaggregated for reporting purposes has limited accountability in demonstrating performance gains for students with disabilities (Simpson, Gong & Marion, 2006). The continual “raising of the performance bar” under NCLB also comes into play in interpreting the trend data reported below. As shown below, Montana has not met its performance target of 41% of districts meeting AYP objectives for progress for students with disabilities since the 2005-06 school year.

**Table 6. LEAs Meeting MT's AYP Objectives for Progress for Students with Disabilities**

Variable	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
# of LEAs with minimum N size subgroup	57	56	70	68
# of LEAs meeting AYP progress objectives	23	28	31	6
% of LEAS meeting AYP progress objectives	40.4%	50%	44.3%	8.8%
Indicator 3A performance target	80%	39%	40.4%	41%



For students with disabilities, educational placement is a variable that can influence access to, and performance in, the general education curriculum. Montana's LRE data, reported in the APR for Indicator 5, is summarized in Table 4. Of most relevance to this discussion are the approximately one-third of the state's students with disabilities who spend between 40 and 70% of the school day in the regular class and the 11% who spend less than 40% in general education. A more detailed analysis of these data indicates that like other states, students with disability labels of mental retardation, emotional disturbance, multiple disabilities, autism, and deaf-blindness receive much of their education outside of the general education setting in Montana (Data Accountability Center, 2010b). For students with mild disabilities that are removed for specialized instruction, the likelihood is that they are being pulled out in the areas of math and reading, remaining in the general education classroom for content areas classes such as social studies and science (e.g., Boon et al., 2006; Cawley et al., 2002).

A pull-out remediation approach represents a traditional model of special education, in which assessment and intervention focused on identified skill deficits, are largely addressed in isolation from the general education curriculum (Nolet, 2006). The limitations of this approach have been well documented in the research literature for many years (e.g., Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1990; Haynes & Jenkins, 1986; Sindelar & Deno, 1978). Language added to IDEA in its 1997 reauthorization emphasized the importance of access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. Both IDEA and NCLB emphasize the principle that the education of students with disabilities must be anchored in the general education curriculum defined by a state's standards framework. Nolet (2006) highlights this shift in thinking and practice, arguing that the

*“The IEP is no longer a substitute for the general education curriculum, but a tool for implementing it”* (pg. 4). While information about standards-based IEPs is just beginning to be disseminated by the OPI, it is neither a requirement nor a common practice at this point in time.

For teachers of students with the highest needs for support, the philosophical shift toward academic skill instruction from a community-referenced, functional curriculum (Browder, 2001; Wehman & Kregel, 2003), is particularly challenging. Spooner and Browder (2006) address the question “why teach the general curriculum?” to students with severe disabilities in a recent publication. They contend that access to the general curriculum means increasing opportunities for students to be exposed to a broader range of instruction than is typically provided. Given the requirements that alternate assessments be aligned with the general education curriculum framework, albeit at a lower level of complexity (Browder et al., 2004), many students are in a catch-22 situation. They are assessed on skills that are not emphasized in their daily instruction. While providing standards-based instruction does not mean totally abandoning functional skill instruction, it is clear that creating an understanding and awareness of this shift is a necessary first step, followed by other forms of support of sufficient intensity to result in a teacher’s ability to put these ideas into practice.

The shifts in thinking and practice necessary to address access to the general education curriculum for students across the full spectrum of disabilities requires effective approaches to service delivery that address the diverse needs of students. Consistent with an inclusive philosophy that says support services should follow the students (Roach, 1995b), instructional models that enable general and special educators to collaboratively plan and deliver instruction that is

intentionally designed to be accessible to all learners, are urgently needed (Hawbaker, Balong, Buckwalter & Runyon; Schumm, Vaughn & Harris, 1997).

Learning Outcomes: Infants, Toddlers, and Preschool Children. In April of 2005, OSEP announced new reporting requirements for child and family outcomes. The actual reporting of these data began in February of 2007. For both Part C and the State 619 programs, data must be reported for three measures: the percent of those served who demonstrate positive social-emotional skills; the percent who acquire and use knowledge and skills; and the percent who use appropriate behavior to meet their needs. The first round of data submitted are summarized in Tables 7 and 8. As illustrated by these data, approximately half of the young children served in Part C programs were performing at a lower level than their same-aged peers. Since this was the first year these data were collected and reported, it is not possible to comment on trends across time. Regardless, it is evident that a program emphasis on early learning and behavioral support is indicated.

**Table 7: Part C Outcome Data (FFY 2007) (DPHHS, 2010)**

Performance Standard	Child Outcome Areas		
	Social-Emotional	Knowledge & Skill	Appropriate Behavior
a. % of infants & toddlers who did not improve functioning	1	1	0.36
b. % of infants & toddlers who improved, but not sufficient to move nearer to	27	27	21

functioning comparable to same-aged peers			
c. % of infants & toddlers who improved to a level nearer to same-aged peers but did not reach it.	18	22	25
d. % of infants & toddlers who improved functioning to reach a level comparable to same-aged peers.	30	36	37
e. % of infants & toddlers who maintained functioning at a level comparable to same-aged peers.	24	14	17
Total	100%	100%	100%

**Table 8: Outcome Data for Preschool Children Exiting in 2008-09 (OPI, 2010)**

<b>Performance Standard</b>	<b>Child Outcome Areas</b>		
	<b>Social- Emotional</b>	<b>Knowledge &amp; Skill</b>	<b>Appropriate Behavior</b>
a. % of children who did not improve functioning	2.8% (n=20)	1.7% (n=12)	2.9% (n=21)
b. % of children who improved, but not sufficient to move nearer to functioning comparable to same-aged peers	18.4% (n=133)	26.2% (n=189)	17.9% (n=129)
c. % of children who improved to a level nearer to same-aged peers but did not reach it.	19.6% (n=141)	40.5% (n=292)	15.1% (n=109)
d. % of children who improved functioning to reach a level comparable to same-aged peers.	14.1% (n=102)	25.5% (n=184)	13.7% (n=00)
e. % of children who maintained functioning at a level comparable to same-aged peers.	45.1% (n=325)	6.1% (n=44)	50.3% (n=363)
Total	100%	100%	100%

Learning Environment. A strong interest in ensuring that schools are “safe” settings in which to learn is evident in the sustained support of the OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS, 2010). Over the years, a talented network of researchers and clinicians have worked to systematically develop, implement, refine, and conduct research about a set of practices and tools to adopt a model of school-wide positive behavioral supports (SW-PBIS) (e.g., Horner et al., 2004; Horner & Sugai, 2000; Turnbull et al., 2002). While the need to respond to inappropriate and challenging student behavior is often the primary motivation for schools to engage in efforts to adopt these practices (Colvin & Fernandez, 2000; Sterrett & Shifflett, 2005) the importance of the climate and culture of classrooms and schools goes far beyond issues of orderliness and discipline.

Research evidence that links socially supportive classroom environments and a student's feeling of “connectedness” to academic gains is growing (e.g., Battistich, Schaps & Wilson, 2004; Cornelius-White, 2007; Schaps, 2005; Schaps, Battistich & Solomon, 2003). There is an increasing awareness that the emphasis on academic progress must not come at the expense of the “social curriculum” (Battistich et al., 1999; Charney, 1997). Purposeful efforts to establish a sense of community with a class and school are essential components of a comprehensive system of behavioral support. This is particularly evident for students with disabilities, who may lack skills and background experiences that contribute to social competence (Korinke et al., 1999; Pavri & Monda-Amaya, 2000).

The interpersonal connections that support student achievement extend to the family and community. Research supports the common sense assumption that when families are meaningfully

involved in their children's education, children do better (e.g., Albin, Dunlap & *Lucyshyn*, 2002; Fantuzzo & McWayne, 2002; McNeal, 1999). Given the complexity and competing demands placed upon families in today's society, it is necessary for schools to provide multiple avenues for family and community engagement (Comer & Haynes, 1991).

Several sources of data provide insight about Montana's needs in relation to creating safe and supportive learning environments for students. Montana's graduation rate, Indicator 1 in the Part B SPP, provides a perspective of the long term outcomes of current school practices. The most recent data submitted to OSEP indicates that Montana did not meet the established target graduation rate of 80%. Based on data from the 2007-08 school year, the graduation rate for students with disabilities was 76.8%. As a result of changes in the definition and calculation of this figure, trend data are not available (OPI, 2010). A recent national report (Education Week, 2010) provides graduation rate data disaggregated by race and gender for each state. It is notable that in Montana, the graduation rates for students who are American Indian, Black, and Hispanic range between 44.3% and 49%, a strong indicator of the challenges facing underrepresented groups in Montana schools.

Dropout rates for students with disabilities (APR Indicator 2) represent the other side of the school completion coin. Once again, because the method of calculation of this figure was modified to be aligned with data collected under ESEA, multi-year comparison of data cannot occur. The SPP performance target for this variable was 5.1%. Montana met this target, with a calculated dropout rate for students with disabilities in grades 7 through 12 of 4.5%.

To examine this issue further, Montana conducted a review of 422 LEAs to determine whether the LEA dropout rate met the state's established performance target of 5.1%. Of this group

of 422, 326 LEAs served students in the target grade range. One hundred forty-four schools had the minimum of 10 students with disabilities required to be part of this calculation. Of this group, 132 (91.7%) met the state performance target.

The rates for the 12 schools whose rates exceeded the state target were examined in terms of the size and type of LEA. Since the size of student population clearly impacts the interpretation of percentage rates, individual school data are summarized in Table 9. The data show that the issue of special education drop-outs is not exclusive to larger districts. The high rates for the small rural schools are alarming. Several of these schools are already identified as “turnaround” schools under ESEA, indicating that systemwide improvement efforts are underway.

**Table 9: LEAs Not Meeting Special Education Dropout State Performance Target**

<b>LEA</b>	<b>Type of LEA/Size of Student Population</b>	<b>Enrolled Students with Disabilities</b>	<b>Dropout Count for Special Ed</b>	<b>Dropout Rate for Special Ed</b>
1	High school > 1,250	695	50	7.2%
2	High school > 1,250	537	40	7.4%
3	High school > 1,250	364	29	8.0%
4	High school > 1,250	164	14	8.5%
5	High school, 401-1,250	102	10	9.8%
6	High school, 401-1,250	57	8	14.0%
7	High school, 76-200	33	5	15.2%



<b>LEA</b>	<b>Type of LEA/Size of Student Population</b>	<b>Enrolled Students with Disabilities</b>	<b>Dropout Count for Special Ed</b>	<b>Dropout Rate for Special Ed</b>
8	High School, 201-400	26	4	15.4%
9	High School, 201-400	30	5	16.6%
10	High School 76-200	20	4	20.0%
11	High School 76-200	10	2	20.0%
12	High School 76-200	28	7	25.0%

The final set of data related to the learning environment in Montana schools is tied to Indicator 4 - Suspension/Expulsion. The calculation for this indicator is based on identifying whether there is a discrepancy in the rate of suspension/expulsion for more than 10 days in a school year for students with and without disabilities. As reported in the APR, there was no statistical difference between the rates of long-term suspensions and expulsions when comparing students with and without disabilities. The state met it's established target of 0%.

**2.3.2 Current Professional Development Initiatives and Infrastructure.** Moving on to needs related to Montana's personnel and professional development infrastructure, several additional areas emerge in considering Montana's needs. They are work initiated with Montana's current SPDG, emerging early childhood initiatives, sources of support for teachers and school leaders, and services for students who need high levels of support.

State Personnel Development Grant. Montana's current SPDG has supported the introduction of the response to intervention (RtI) model in many districts across the state, and continued work on the Montana Behavior Initiative (MBI) (i.e., Montana's positive behavior intervention and support (PBIS) project). In the first years of this project, initial work around RtI occurred as part of a state-level pilot project. Currently, expansion efforts have occurred within each of the 5 CSPD Regions, with coordination continuing at the state level. The growing network of schools involved in the RtI initiative have been supported by a statewide network of facilitators and regional consultants. Job descriptions for these part-time personnel are provided in Appendix F. The OPI has relied upon well recognized consultants (e.g., Wayne Callender, Don Deshler, Kevin Feldman, Marla Dewhirst) to deliver an initial foundation of information to school-based teams.

RTI Implementation has been conceptualized as a three phase process: Exploring, Implementing, and Sustaining. A sequence of training, increasing in depth, is aligned with these phases. (See Appendix F for RtI Levels of Implementation and RtI Training Matrix). Based on input from school facilitators, additional training is provided at the regional level. This is likely to focus on specific strategies for tiered interventions, use of data-based decision-making, etc. Facilitators provide on-site support and assist schools with implementation issues and action planning.

The Montana Behavior Initiative (MBI) is the name of the statewide effort in the area of positive behavioral intervention and supports. (Note: PBIS is used throughout this proposal rather than PBS to distinguish this initiative for those outside of the educational community from the Public Broadcasting System.) The MBI predates the SPDG, and was initiated with leadership from

the state education agency. Oversight and coordination of this initiative has remained there. Like RtI, the informational component of the professional development associated with this initiative is delivered in phases. A network of regional consultants work with school level teams to provide on-site support for implementation. Schools identify an individual to be a site facilitator, serving as the point of communication between the MBI consultant and the school team. A Summer Institute provides the opportunity for additional tiered training (something for schools at each level of implementation) and networking.

A solid foundation has been established with both of the initiatives with the current SPDG, but there is much more to be done. Montana's situation in this regard is not unique. Comments made by Fuchs and Deshler (2007) were expanded upon by Sandomierski, Kincaid and Allgozzine (2007), to address the current status of RtI and PBIS efforts. They conclude: *"..it is untrue and misleading to claim that we currently have a necessary and sufficient knowledge base to guide the implementation of RtI [and PBIS] across all grades, for all academic [and behavior] skills, in all content areas, for all children and youth. We have few models of districts implementing these systems across all schools and all three levels for all students"* (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007, pg. 134 as cited in Sandomierski et al., 2007, pg. 6-7).

A recent document addressing the vision of the future of Montana RtI (see Appendix F) describes specific needs for refinement and expansion on the work that has been done to date. While a similar document has not yet been created for the PBIS initiative, this work will be necessary as part of the state level planning for Project REAL, should Montana be successful with this application.

School Leadership. The implementation of new school-wide academic and behavioral support systems creates new challenges for school leaders. It is easy for the needs of students with disabilities to become overshadowed by larger systemic issues. Beyond the programmatic challenges of providing the necessary services to meet individual student needs, recent waivers granted to two states allowing them to reduce their financial support to local school districts (Samuels, 2010) exemplifies fiscal challenges as well.

New models of service delivery (e.g., early intervening; RtI; co-teaching) have contributed to what many have argued is a necessary “blurring of the lines” between general and special education (Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Will, 1986). Rather than focusing on labels as a necessary prerequisite to receiving individualized services, the idea is to blend the resources and expertise of general and special educators to support diverse learners in general education settings. The key to making this shift successful is to ensure that necessary supports are available to students in the general education classroom (Roach, 1995a).

Given the critical role of the building leader in creating learning environments that are responsive to the needs of diverse learners (NAESP 2001 a,b) , it is important to consider the programmatic background they need to have. DiPaola and colleagues comment on this issue:

*...instructional leaders who understand students with disabilities, IDEA and NCLB requirements, and effective practice are better prepared to provide students and their teachers with appropriate classroom support. .... For example, good leaders understand that classroom heterogeneity is the foundation of inclusive education, and they refuse to allow a few classrooms to become academic “dumping grounds”*

*for students with the most challenging academic needs. They work closely with their teams to create balanced classroom rosters, manageable caseload responsibilities, and appropriate in-class support for students and teachers. They know that most traditional response to academic failure - such as pull-out programs, whole-class ability grouping, and grade retention - do not work well. Good leaders work proactively with their teams to develop more effective student- and site-specific responses to low performance (pg. 4).*

The next logical question then, is what, in their training, prepares school leaders to know these things? A review of the course requirements in Educational Leadership programs at the UMT and MSU confirms that programs of study include cursory information about special education issues. Where it is addressed, the emphasis is on the law rather than on programmatic or service delivery issues.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention The National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services has compiled supply and demand data for specific specialties in the area of special education (NCPSSERS, 2010). Considerable shortages of teachers qualified to teach students with vision loss, hearing loss, learning disabilities, emotional/behavioral disabilities, and those served in multicategorical classrooms are reported. These data are based on educator supply and demand research reports, as well as data collected from the American Association for Employment in Education.

While special education personnel shortages are an issue nationally (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008), rural areas face unique challenges relative to the training, recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel (Collins, 2007; Ludlow, 1998). New teachers are

often reluctant to move to rural settings due to their isolation and lack of economic opportunities. A statewide study documented the well known exodus of Montana-trained teachers to higher paying, out-of-state positions (Nielson, 2001, 2002). Nielson (2001) found that while approximately 900 students finish teacher education programs in Montana each year, only 29% of the graduates are teaching in this state two years after finishing college.

The literature on teacher attrition also provides some valuable lessons in thinking about retaining personnel. Undesirable workplace conditions (Billingsley & Cross, 1991) as well as role conflict, role ambiguity, and stress (Billingsley & Cross, 1992), are good predictors of job attrition, job commitment and job satisfaction. Other evidence indicates that teachers leave in the absence of (a) support from school leadership; (b) organizational structures and working conditions that convey respect and value; and (c) induction and mentoring programs for new teachers (Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson et al., 2001).

Teacher mentoring programs have been developing in Montana since 2002. Comprehensive best-practice resources in developing a school or district mentor program have been developed and improved upon as new resources become available. In addition, an annual Mentor Institute provides training for teacher mentors based on the curriculum developed by Laura Lipton and Bruce Wellman (2003). Part of the Institute is open to administrators and trustees to learn more about best practices for developing a local mentor program.

The Mentoring Matters curriculum has some cognitive coaching influences. Since 2006, the Institute and train-the-trainer institute have been open to school coaches. Specific training for school coaches has been increasing over the last three years. CSPD regions have worked with Dr.

Jim McKnight and the Kansas Coaching Project in providing training and a coaching institute. These efforts, implemented collaboratively with Title I, are used as interventions with schools that do not meet AYP.

The other personnel issue of concern is the status of special education personnel relative to the highly qualified criteria of NCLB. As indicated in Table 10, this issue impacts a relatively small number of special educators in the state.

**Table 10: Special Education Personnel in Montana (2008-09 school year) (OPI, 2009)**

Position	Highly Qualified	Not Highly Qualified	Total
Preschool (3-5) special educator	44.75	.26	45.01
Special Educator	863.15	9.71	872.86
Paraprofessional, preschool (3-5)	55.07	0	55.07
Paraprofessional, K-12	1,230.54	0	1,230.54

Students Who Need High Levels of Support. The final area of exploration in identifying needs in Montana relates to the education of students who need high levels of support. There are several systemic variables that negatively impact the capacity of Montana teachers to provide effective services to these students. First, there is an extremely limited range of graduate level specialization options available across the university system because student enrollment cannot sustain substantial levels of differentiation. At the present time, there is no coursework specifically focused on the needs of students with low incidence disabilities. Given the small number of courses required for a special education endorsement, it is clear that the emphasis is placed on those students with high incidence disabilities. Second, the presence of a student with significant support needs may be a “once in a lifetime” experience for many teachers in Montana's small rural schools. Special educators in these small schools support students across the full spectrum of disabilities and across a wide range of grades. Most resource room teachers simply do not have the expertise to develop and implement a meaningful program for a student with a significant disability. As a result, they often are assigned to a paraeducator who assumes responsibility for keeping the student



engaged in activities without access to information about best practices. They become a "class of 1", with little connection to other students, much less the general education curriculum.

If the student who needs high levels of support is a student who is deaf or blind, outreach personnel from the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind (MSDB) are available to work with classroom personnel to help them with communication, instructional issues, and accessible instructional materials. However, each consultant covers a large area and is challenged to provide the intensity of support that is often needed in schools who do not have personnel trained in deafness or blindness. A concept paper written by the school's superintendent (Gettel, 2009) and presented to the Montana Board of Public Education, underscores the need for more resources and comprehensive efforts to ensure that teachers working with students who have sensory limitations have the knowledge necessary to provide effective educational supports for these students.

Preschool. In 2007, Montana submitted an application for technical assistance to the Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL) located at the Orleana Hawks Puckett Institute. Montana was one of eight states selected, and has been involved in collaborative activities since 2008. A leadership team (the Early Childhood Partnership for Professional Development) has been established to guide the overall direction of the project. To date, a document has been developed that cross-walks Montana's early learning guidelines with CELL's practice guides, enabling practitioners and families to see the relationship between CELL materials and their ongoing instructional efforts. A statewide training plan was developed, resulting in three train-the-trainer sessions occurring in different regions of the state. To date, a total of 40 people have been trained in the use of this model. The expectation is that trainers will serve as an early literacy resource in their

program/region, participate in follow-up support, and provide data to CELL that documents training they have provided. A good infrastructure has been established with CELL's support and guidance.

A more outcome-focused initiative that looks at application of model practices is the next logical step.

Within the social/emotional arena, the Department of Public Health and Human Services has begun work with the program developed by the Center on the Social Emotional Foundations of Early Learning (CSEFEL) located at Vanderbilt University. CSEFEL is a five-year project focused on capacity-building efforts within Head Start and Child care programs to improve the social and emotional outcomes of children. Like CELL, this group is developing training and technical assistance materials that reflect evidence-based practices for promoting social and emotional development and preventing challenging behaviors. In Montana, the STARS to Quality Program has been initiated by the Early Childhood Services Bureau as an initiative to improve early childhood programs in Montana. They have sponsored CSEFEL training as part of this quality improvement effort, subcontracting with the Early Childhood Project at Montana State University to coordinate this initiative.

Like RTI and PBIS initiatives for school-aged children, CELL and CSEFEL are complementary efforts that address needs of the whole child. Personnel from these projects (Carol Trivette and Allison Jones) are beginning to explore the concept of integrating these initiatives. As a first step, a "cross-walk" of program practices has been created. Montana's engagement in these two initiatives focused on improving learning and social outcomes will continue with support from these two outside entities.

**2.3.3 Implications.** Based on a consideration of these data and the existing infrastructure of supports in Montana, the following emerge as critical needs in this state.

- Provide state leadership to continue/expand use of evidence-based multi-tiered systems of academic and behavioral support. A foundation has been established with current SPDG funding to help schools implement effective practices to improve academic and social outcomes. These efforts must continue, with a focus on efficiency of implementation, fidelity, and scaling up. State coordination and leadership is needed to model and guide these efforts.
- Provide multiple avenues of support to schools working to adopt evidence-based multi-tiered systems of academic and behavioral support. The professional development infrastructure to support statewide RtI and PBIS initiatives needs to be strengthened to support expanded and evolving (e.g., braiding) approaches to implementation.
- Reduce achievement gap. Within tiered models of support, strategies must be used to close the performance gap between students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities. This will require training and technical assistance focused on evidence-based practices to promote academic gains for students with disabilities that can be implemented within the general education setting.
- Increase access to the general education curriculum. Special education personnel need to be engaged with their general education colleagues to develop and implement standards-based instruction for students with disabilities. This begins with developing IEPs aligned with

standards, and continues with instruction delivered in general education settings that are flexible and responsive to the full range of needs of students in the class.

- Target support to school leaders. Information and support needs to be directed to school leaders to increase their understanding of the curricular and organizational implications of tiered systems of support and associated service delivery models that create responsive classrooms environments in which all can succeed.
- Support teachers. Montana needs to continue efforts designed to keep effective teachers in the classroom. The isolation associated with positions in small, remotely located schools can be reduced through teacher networking and support strategies such as coaching and mentoring.
- Extend effective models of academic and social support to programs serving preschool children. Montana's current involvement with two national centers focused on evidence-based practices for young children provides a solid launching point for expanded work in this area. Consultants trained in these models are poised to begin implementation and/or support others within their region to do so.
- Support low incidence populations. Personnel who are involved with students with the highest need for support must be supported to understand and adopt practices that provide access to the general education curriculum.
- Use technology to improve efficiency. Those engaged in the delivery of technical assistance and training need to learn to effectively use technology to work more efficiently and maximize the time spent in face-to-face interactions with school personnel.

Given the scope of needs identified, it was necessary to prioritize areas of activity to address through Project REAL. This analysis, the identified initiatives that are aligned with priority needs, and the anticipated outcomes of Project REAL are summarized within a logic model format, contained in Figure 3.

## PROJECT REAL

Planning – Implementation – Evaluation

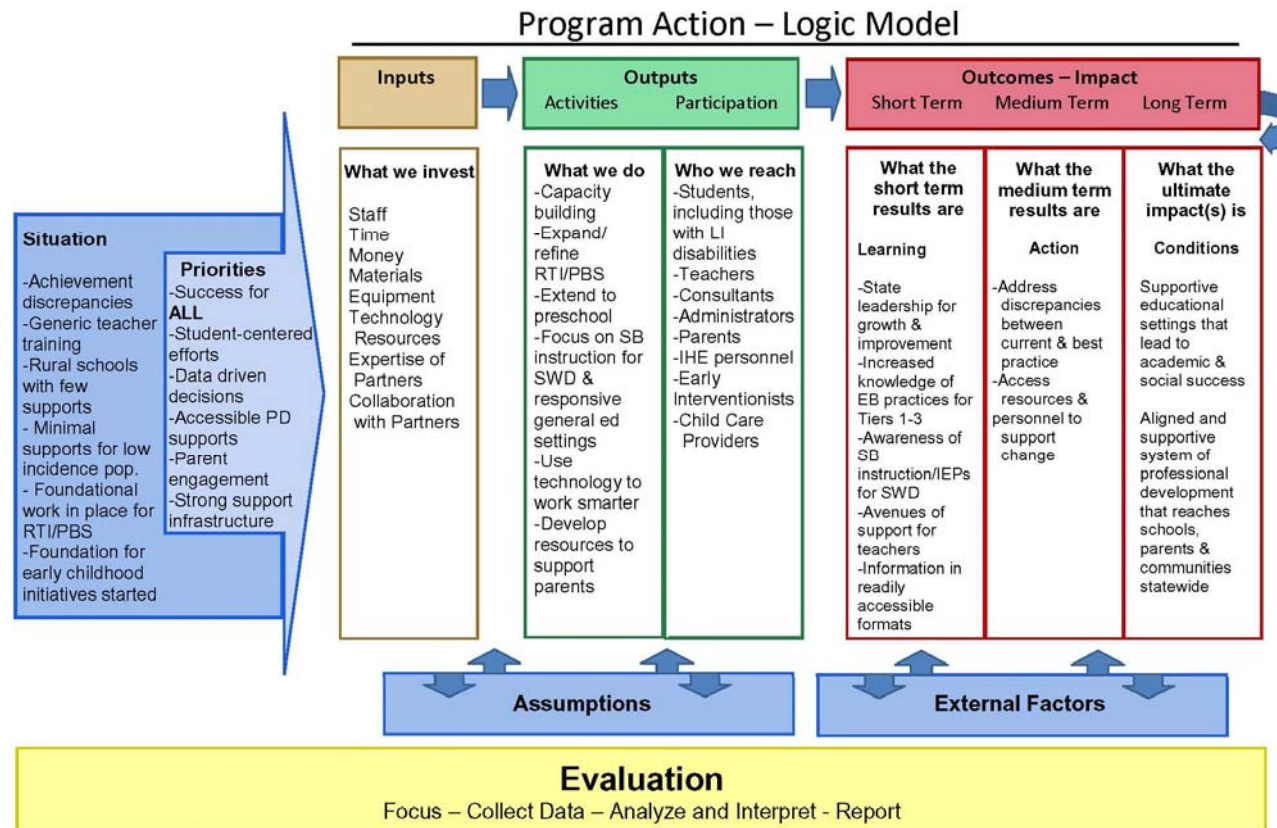


Figure 3: Logic Model

**2.4 Plans to Address Identified Needs.** Described in more detail in the Project Design section, the professional development efforts that will be supported through Project REAL are organized around 3 goals and corresponding initiative areas:

State Level Capacity-Building - The goal of this initiative is to expand the capacity of the SEA to provide the resources, training and supervision to help schools improve outcomes for students. Activities falling within this initiative are focused on (1) increasing the capacity of SEA personnel to provide the necessary leadership and guidance to schools to integrate multi-tiered support systems focused on academic and behavior support at the elementary and high school levels ; and (2) expanding the expertise of a network of consultants and facilitators who provide training and onsite technical assistance and coaching in the areas of RtI and PBIS.

Support to LEAs to implement effective models and strategies - This initiative will provide training, technical assistance, and coaching supports available to elementary and high school schools to support the implementation and integration of multi-tiered systems of academic and behavioral support; and training focused specifically on the school leaders in these settings. Pilot efforts will be initiated to extend these approaches to a cohort of programs serving preschool children, and initiatives to increase parent involvement in these efforts will occur for programs both preschool and school-aged children. Across all of these initiatives, creative uses of technology will be explored to enable the project to work efficiently and effectively in addressing needs statewide.

Low Incidence Support. This initiative will provide intensive and specialized support to personnel working with students who need high levels of support. Using a sequenced system

of support, teachers will be introduced to program information and intervention strategies that are likely to be new to them. They will then be provided with support to implement these practices to increase access to and progress in the general education curriculum.

### **3. 0 Significance**

**3.1 Likelihood that Project will Result in Systems Change or Improvement.** At a time when accountability has become one of the most frequently used words in our educational vocabulary, it is appropriate that a project's significance be assessed relative to the likelihood that systemic change or improvement will occur as a result of project activities. Grant funding will support activities that have been intentionally designed to maximize the likelihood of positive outcomes. As summarized in this section, the strategies and approaches in Project REAL reflect the guidance from the literature about (a) professional development; (b) systems change and school improvement and (c) evidence-based models and intervention strategies to support students in heterogeneous classrooms. Letters of support (Appendix A) from those who would benefit from the work of Project REAL attest to the social validity of the proposed activities for Montana educators, students, and their families.

**3.1.1 Effective Professional Development Practices.** In the words of Kent (2004), "*Professional development is the catalyst to transforming theory into current best teaching practices*" (pg. 427). The research-to-practice gap (Malouf & Schiller, 1995) in special education is a national concern (e.g., Abbott, Alton, Tapia & Greenwood, 1999; Forman, Smallwood & Nagle, 2005). One of the reasons frequently cited for this gap is the failure of traditional forms of professional development (Guskey & Huberman, 1995; Joyce & Showers, 1995), organized around brief workshops, to change teacher practice.



Multiple Methods Over Time. Studies that have examined professional development approaches in relation to the adoption of evidence-based practices indicate that a mix of training, classroom consultation, feedback, and teacher collaboration over 1, 2, or more years were required to produce measurable changes in teacher practice (Gersten, Morant & Brengelman, 1995; Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm & Klingner, 1998). In a direct comparison of four professional development formats, Tshannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) found that a professional development format that supported mastery experiences through follow-up coaching had the strongest effect on beliefs of self-efficacy and implementation of a new approach to reading instruction. Similarly, Boudah and colleagues (2004) documented success in the use of an “authentic professional development” model, characterized by (a) quality instruction for adult learners, (b) teacher empowerment, (c) well-matched needs and activities, and (d) use of individualized teacher follow-up to sustain improvement in instruction. Finally, Leko and Brownell (2009) underscore the importance of providing a network of collegial support for special educators in professional development initiatives, while providing opportunities to expand their content knowledge.

Coaching. Work of the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) (Blase & Fixsen, 2009) has provided comprehensive information about the context, content, and conditions necessary for effective coaching for professional development. This information has been put into an assessment format (Blase, Fixsen, Van Dyke & Duda, 2009) that will be used by Project REAL to develop and increase the capacity of the state’s current network of regional consultants and facilitators tied to its RtI and PBIS initiative (See tool in Appendix G).

At the teacher and student level, the work of Jim Knight has been introduced in this state (Knight, 2007; Knight, Schumacher & Deshler, 2002). His works provides a strong foundation to

establish the rationale for a coaching approach, as well as clear conceptualization of the model components (i.e., enroll, identify, explain, model, observe, explore, refine) (Knight, 2009). While there is considerable need for more research about coaching, there is a foundation of evidence supporting its effectiveness, specifically including the partnership model developed by Knight (Cornett & Knight, 2009).

Distance Technologies. Larry Edelman, a technology consultant who has worked with the OSEP-funded Technical Assistance and Dissemination network, identifies four reasons to use technology to support technical assistance and professional development efforts (Edelman, 2009). They are: to improve effectiveness, reduce costs, increase access, and to engage younger personnel who are more likely to be “digital natives”. Table 11 highlights shifts in his thinking about learning, teaching, technical assistance, and information dissemination in response to a growing toolbox of inexpensive and relatively easy to use technology supports that resonated strongly with the project design team.

**Table 11: Some Shifts in Thinking Stimulated by Technology** (Edelman, 2009)

<b>Shifts in How People Learn.....</b>	
<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>
Read an article copied from a journal	Read an online article with hyperlinked video clips
Listen to a presentation on a CD	Listen to a podcast while riding a bike
Attend a conference/workshop	Participate in an online webinar
Watch a purchased DVD	Watch a free YouTube video on the web
Listen to presenter/instructor	Listserves; online discussions with those who share common interests
<b>Shifts in How We Teach.....</b>	
Teach a face to face course	Teach an online course
Co-present at a conference	Skype in a co-presenter
Develop a train the trainer guide	Develop online learning modules
<b>Shifts in the Delivery of Technical Assistance.....</b>	
Onsite technical assistance	Videoconference/webinar
Gather info via print surveys	Online surveys
Produce a guidance document	

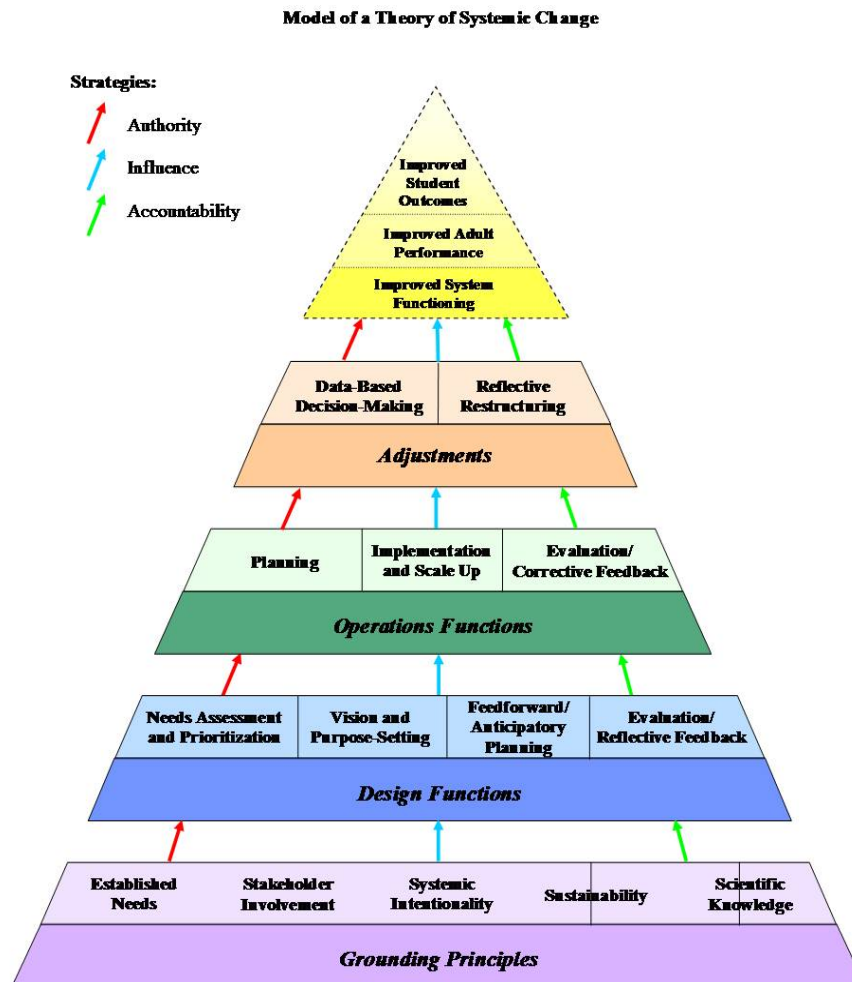
	Produce an interactive knowledge base
<b>Shifts in Information Dissemination.....</b>	
Distribute binder of materials	Distribute flash drive; post on website; wiki
Distribute a DVD	Post video on web
E-mail a memo	Email a link to a podcast or vidcast

These shifts stimulated much thought about how the use of technology could support Project REAL to work more efficiency and effectively. While some of tools mentioned are not new to those involved in professional development activities in Montana, there are clearly many new options to be considered, particularly in the area of distance forms of technical assistance and coaching. One technology not referenced in this table that is of interest to the Project REAL team is the use of “bug in the ear” technology to provide coaching (Rock et al., 2009). While the concept of using audio-cueing for training in the educational setting is not new (Bowles & Nelson, 1976; Van de Mars, 1988), advances in mobile and internet technology make it possible to provide virtual coaching at a distance (Rock et al., 2009). Effective applications have been documented using these approaches to provide feedback and supervision to preservice teachers (Pemberton et al., 2004; Scheeler, McAfee, Ruhl & Lee, 2006) as well as to support dialogue between student teachers and cooperating teachers (Khan, 2002). Given the challenges of distance and staffing, it is clear that this approach holds great promise for those supporting teachers in Montana schools.

**3.1.2 Focus on Systemic Change.** Do schools, teachers, and classrooms ever really change? Responding to the complexity of this issue, some school reform experts have been quite pessimistic.

In 1991, Fullan wrote *"How can it be that so much school reform has taken place over the last century, yet schooling appears pretty much the same as it's always been* (pg. 29)? Similarly, Cuban (1988) wrote *"The ingredients change, the Chinese saying goes, but the soup remains the same"* (pg. 343). Commenting again on the observation that schools don't change, Cuban later (1996) wrote: *"Such a myth is not only mistaken, but is also the basis for the profound pessimism that presently exists over the capacity of public schools to improve. The fact is that over the last century, there have been many organizational, governance, curricular, and even instructional changes in public schools. Such changes have been adopted, adapted, implemented, and institutionalized"* (Cuban, 1996, pg. 75).

Accepting the premise that school change, including fundamental, systemic change (Cuban, 1996) can and does occur, much effort has gone into understanding how to make that happen. Fiore and colleagues (2010) have developed a model to describe the dynamics of system change based on a study of earlier funded State Improvement Grants. As depicted in Figure 4, three strategies - influence, authority, and accountability - connect the sequence of decisions and actions that are designed to ultimately result in improved child outcomes. The needs analysis process and resulting logic model presented in the previous section is consistent with the first levels of this model. The strategies to address the operations and adjustments components of the model (layers 3 and 4) are addressed in Section 4.



**Figure 4: Westat Model of Systemic Change (Fiore et al., 2010)**

Finally, as important as it is to be guided about how to produce a desired change, it is equally valuable to consider what has been learned from an analysis of unsuccessful efforts. Hargreaves (1997) summarized over a decade of study of educational change. Based on this body of literature, he identified nine circumstances that contribute to the failure of educational change. Both in the

design and implementation of Project REAL, the factors identified and described in Table 12 will serve as a valuable reference point to evaluate the quality of project plans and procedures.

**Table 12: Synthesis of the Change Literature** (Modified format from Hargreaves, pg.viii)

Why Changes Does Not Succeed
<p><b>Rationale.</b> The reason for the change is poorly conceptualized or not clearly demonstrated. It is not obvious who will benefit and how. What the change will achieve for students in particular is not spelled out.</p>
<p><b>Scope.</b> The change is too broad and ambitious so that teachers have to work on too many fronts, or it is too limited and specific so that little real change occurs at all.</p>
<p><b>Pace.</b> The change is too fast for people to cope with, or too slow so that they become impatient or bored and move on to something else.</p>
<p><b>Resources.</b> The change is poorly resourced or resources are withdrawn once the first flush of innovation is over. There is not enough money for materials or time for teachers to plan. The change is built on the back of teachers, who cannot bear it for long without additional support.</p>
<p><b>Commitment.</b> There is no long-term commitment to the change to carry people through the anxiety, frustration, and despair of early experimentation and unavoidable setbacks.</p>
<p><b>Key Staff.</b> Key staff who can contribute to the change, or might be affected by it, are not committed. Conversely, key staff might be over-involved as an administrative elite, from which other teachers feel excluded. Resistance and resentment are the consequences in either</p>

case.
<b>Parents.</b> Parents oppose the change because they are kept at a distance from it. Professionals can collaborate so enthusiastically among themselves that they involve the community too little or too late, and lose a vital form of support on which successful schoolwide change depends.
<b>Leadership.</b> Leaders are either too controlling, too ineffectual, or cash in on the early success of the innovation to move on to higher things.
<b>Relationship to Other Initiatives.</b> The change is pursued in isolation and gets undermined by other unchanged structures. Conversely, the change may be poorly coordinated with and engulfed by a tidal wave of parallel changes that make it hard for teachers to focus their effort.

**3.1.3 Implementation of Evidence-Based Models and Practices (EBP).** Beyond the use of sound frameworks to guide the design and implementation of Project REAL activities, it is essential that the practices that are the focus of adoption are, themselves, evidence-based. While this statement sounds simple, it is, in fact, a complex task to determine just which practices meet this standard. While there is much debate about the research designs and other factors that contribute to the rigor of a body of evidence (Cook et al., 2009), the importance of using practices known to be effective cannot be minimized. Dammann and Vaughn (2001) aptly point out that while many nondisabled students make adequate progress under a variety of instructional conditions, students with disabilities and those who have not met with academic success, require the most effective teaching techniques in order to learn.



The guidelines provided by Whitehurst (2002 as cited in Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009) have been utilized for our purposes. Whitehurst defined EBP as the use of practices, interventions, and treatments which have been proven, through data-based research, to be effective in improving outcomes for individuals when the practice is implemented with fidelity. He further describes evidence-based education as the integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction. This latitude in considering the “best available” evidence is particularly relevant in determining EBP for students who need high levels of support. Horner and colleagues (2005) discuss the use of single-subject design research, for example, as a relevant source of evidence. For populations of students with low incidence disabilities, for whom large N, randomized research designs are not feasible, well designed single subject research is the best source of credible evidence to determine what works.

The models that will be adopted in Project REAL are well established, with component strategies that have been well documented in the literature. Based on currently available information, the status of the models and approaches that will be found in the project design is summarized in Table 13. Due to space concerns, the evidence cited is illustrative rather than comprehensive.

**Table 13: Evidence-Based Models and Practices Utilized in Project REAL**

<b>Capacity Building Initiative</b>	
<b>Associated Practices</b>	<b>Evidence of Effectiveness/Professional Wisdom</b>
Braiding implementation of RtI and	Strong support for component practices of both
Emphasis on best practices in coaching	Based on the research of the National Implementation Research Network (Blase et al., 2009) and Knight (2007, 2009)
Sustained and multi-level approaches to professional development	Professional wisdom (Guskey, 2000) supported by research (Boudah et al., 2004; Gersten, Morant & Brengelman, 1995; Tshannen-Moran and McMaster, 2009; Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm & Klingner, 1998)
<b>Support to LEAs</b>	
Response to Intervention	11 field studies documented positive outcomes (Dexter et al., 2008)
Schoolwide PBIS	Research that supports practices at each tier are summarized (PBIS, 2009)
Formative Evaluation/Data-Based	.70 effect size documented in research summarized

Decision-Making	by (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Stecker et al, 2008)
Collaborative instructional planning	Professional guidance from experienced practitioners (Hawbaker et al. 2001) as well as researchers (Schumm, Harris & Vaughn, 1997)
Co-teaching	Emerging data base highlights conditions necessary for success (Dieker, 201; Scruggs et al., 2007; Weiss, 2004)
Center on Early Childhood Literacy Model and materials	Research to practice framework guides all Center activities (Dunst et al., 2006); research-based practice guides for parents and practitioners
Early childhood model of social-emotional support (CSEFEL)	Work of Center is based on a comprehensive synthesis of evidence-based competencies for promoting social & emotional development in early care & education settings (Cimino, et al, 2007)
<b>Low Incidence Support</b>	
Applied behavior analysis methodology	Research summarized by (Kavale & Forness, 2000) indicates a .93 effect size for method.
Differentiated standards-based instruction for students with disabilities	Professional wisdom, informed by research (Browder & Spooner, 2006; Hoover & Patton, 2004;

	Nolet, 2006; )
Standards-Based IEPs for students with low incidence disabilities	Professional wisdom endorsed by researchers (Grisham-Brown & Kearns, 2001; Lynch & Adams, 2008; Nolet & McLaughlin, 2005) with emerging support from policy makers (Ahearn, 2010)
Responsive general ed strategies (e.g., UDL, differentiated instruction) that facilitate access to the general ed curriculum	Practices such as UDL and DI have strong professional support as means of supporting differences among learners (Acree et al., 2005; Hitchcock et al., 2002; Spooner et al., 2007)

Beyond utilizing practices with an evidence-base, there is a growing amount of guidance in the work of the National Implementation Research Network (NIRN), about how to conceptualize the process of adopting an evidence-based practice and align supports to facilitate movement through identified stages of implementation. Summarizing this work (Fixsen, Panzano, Naoom & Blase, 2008), defined indicators of these stages of implementation are described in Table 14.

**Table 14: Stages of Implementation** (Fixsen et al., pg. 13-15)

<b>Exploration:</b> An agency/group is actively considering the use of an EBP or other innovation, but has not yet decided to actually use one.
<b>Installation:</b> An agency/group has decided to use an innovation and is actively working to get things set up to use it.
<b>Initial Implementation:</b> The first newly trained practitioner attempts to use the new

EBP/innovation with a real client/consumer.
<b>Full Implementation:</b> Occurs when at least 50% of the positions are filled with practitioners who currently meet the fidelity criteria.
<b>Innovation:</b> Occurs after full implementation has been reached and maintained for a reasonable period of time; the changes to the innovation are being made in a deliberate way; and the results of change are being carefully evaluated.
<b>Sustainability:</b> If an agency meets the full implementation criterion 7 out of 12 months for five consecutive years, it has “sustained” the implementation of the innovation.

Summary/Implications. The professional development initiatives of Project REAL have been conceptualized to reflect current knowledge about effective professional development, systems change, and evidence-based practices. Specifically, a systemic approach will be taken, working within schools and districts to support a phased-in adoption of evidence-based initiatives. This will occur with state oversight and leadership, using the same data-based decision-making processes that are to be used at the local level. Further, effective approaches to providing the professional development experiences necessary to result in a change in practice at the local level will be utilized. Finally, the focus of this professional development will be on practices that have an evidence base of effectiveness. It is the intent of project staff to integrate technology-based strategies in new and innovative ways to ensure equitable statewide access to information and resources and to work efficiently.

#### 4.0 Quality of the Project Design

In this section, the design and scope of the project is described. First, the goals, objectives and outcomes of Project REAL are identified. This is followed by a discussion of the strands of activity intended to lead to the successful accomplishment of project objectives. Addressing the remaining project design evaluation criteria, information is provided to illustrate the alignment of the design elements with state needs and standards of best professional practice. The mechanics of project implementation are described in Section 6 - Project Management.

#### **4.1 Extent to Which Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes are Clearly Specified and Measurable.**

Project REAL has been organized around 3 goals. The specific, measurable objectives and intended outcomes associated with each are summarized in Tables 15, 17, and 18. The approach to implementing each initiative is presented.

**Table 15: Goal 1, Objectives, and Measurable Outcomes**

<b><u>Goal 1 - Capacity Building:</u></b> To increase state level capacity to provide leadership, professional development, and guidance to schools to improve academic and social outcomes for students with the adoption of multi-tiered systems of academic and behavioral support.	
<b>Goal 1 Objectives</b>	<b>Goal 1 Measurable Outcomes</b>
1.1 To develop training strategies, planning tools, and resources to guide the braided implementation of RtI and PBIS models.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training materials piloted, refined, and made available for use by facilitators</li> <li>• Tools and planning guides posted on website</li> <li>• Use of materials (requests/website hit)</li> <li>• Usefulness of materials and approaches</li> </ul>

<p>1.2 To refine strategies and supports to implement RtI at the secondary level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources guides completed identifying Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for secondary students</li> <li>• Completion of secondary RtI implementation guide for facilitators</li> <li>• Increase in number of secondary schools using RtI model</li> </ul>
<p>1.3 To develop a cadre of skilled facilitators to deliver onsite supports to schools implementing RtI and PBIS models.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of facilitators demonstrating competency in supporting multi-tier model implementation</li> <li>• Number of facilitators demonstrate competency in coaching</li> <li>• Number of facilitators demonstrating competency in use of distance technology to deliver support to school personnel</li> </ul>
<p>1.4 To support school leaders to address the organizational and resource implications of integrated multi-tiered systems of student support.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of a sequence of training for school leaders, focused on administrative issues</li> <li>• Level of use of technology-based forums to support cross-site administrator</li> </ul>

	networking and problem-solving
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Two strands of activity will support the implementation of Goal 1 objectives. The first focuses on resource development, while the second encompasses training specifically focused on capacity building. Each strand is described below.

Resource Development. To date, the Montana RtI and PBIS initiatives have been complementary, but largely parallel, efforts. During the years of the previous SPDG, each initiative has developed a sustained sequence of school support. (See Appendix F for implementation approaches in place for each initiative). Foundational information is provided to teams in participating schools in phases, representing sustained efforts to adopt new practices across time (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman & Wallace, 2005). Support for adoption of model practices is provided by on-site facilitators, with coordination of training addressing individual school/regional needs handled by a regional consultant. Schools are provided with tools to assess their implementation and assist in action planning. (See samples provided in Appendix G).

Through participation in the national SPDG network, project staff have been introduced to the concepts of integrating these models (e.g., Sandomierski, Kincaid & Algozzine, 2007; Sugai & Horner, 2009). A leadership team will be formed to map out the overlap and alignment of these initiatives. It will be comprised of staff currently overseeing the separate initiatives (Bailey-Anderson and Brown-Chauvet), as well as representatives from the regional consultant and site facilitator MBI and RtI networks.



This team will work to develop the necessary materials and guidance to prepare for piloting the braiding approach. Recent work underway in other SPDG projects (e.g., Illinois, Michigan) to braid RtI and PBIS practices has provided some initial guidance, while underscoring the need for a coherent vision of implementation. As described by Goodman (2010), substantial effort is required at the state level to map out an implementation process and navigate policy barriers that may inhibit effective implementation.

This will involve careful study of the conceptual “crosswalk” between the two initiatives. Analyses such as that presented by Haithcock and Gann (2008), summarized in Table 16, are helpful starting points. It is easy to see that the systems required to implement and sustain the initiatives are similar, while focused on different curricular domain. Training will be developed to help schools understand the common practices, and map out action plans that allow them to address these common areas together. Tools developed by other states who have started with this process will provide a starting point for the development of approaches customized to Montana’s needs (See Appendix G for examples - braiding worksheet; data audit tool). Once they have been customized and piloted for use in Montana, the tools will be converted into an electronic web-based format to facilitate ease and efficiency of use.

**Table 16: Comparisons of Multi-tiered Support Systems Focused on Behavior and Academics** (Haithcock & Gann, 2008).

Behavior	Academic
<b>Systems (how things are done)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team based problem solving</li> </ul>	<b>Systems (how things are done)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team based problem solving</li> </ul>

Behavior	Academic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data-based decision making</li> <li>• Long Term sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data-based decision making</li> <li>• Long Term sustainability</li> </ul>
<p><b>Data (How decisions are made)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavior Screening</li> <li>• Ongoing data collection &amp; use based on Tier</li> <li>• ODR's (# per day/month, location, behavior student)</li> <li>• Suspension/expulsion, attendance, tardies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Data (How decisions are made)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuous data collection &amp; use based on Tier (e.g., benchmark, strategic, frequent progress monitoring)</li> <li>• CBM (or members of the CBM "family" like DIBELS) as the critical outcomes for basic skills</li> <li>• Performance discrepancy (educational need) and benefit (rate of improvement)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Practices (How staff interact with students)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct teaching of behavioral expectations</li> <li>• Ongoing reinforcement of expected behaviors</li> <li>• Functional behavioral assessment</li> </ul>	<p><b>Practices (How staff interact with students)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scientifically based curriculum (good tools)</li> <li>• Scientifically based instruction (good training)</li> <li>• Consultation when students aren't benefiting (support)</li> </ul>

This team will also take time to “take stock” of where schools current engaged in RTI and/or PBIS are in terms of the phased-in implementation of these initiatives, using this information to inform training plans as well as, the allocation of support personnel and resources. Evaluative information from the pilot braiding initiative (Goal 2) will be closely monitored by this team so that successful strategies can be integrated within the support systems for the network of schools not yet formally engaged in a braiding approach. It is important to note that in Montana's smallest schools, the RtI leadership team IS or WOULD BE the PBIS leadership team, so ways to work more efficiently can be easily shared.

Nationally, the implementation of multi-tiered systems of support at the secondary level has lagged behind efforts in elementary schools. In a review of implementation of RtI practices across a 10 year period of time, OSEP personnel observed “The greatest challenge in implementing RtI is the limited experience of doing so on a large scale, across all academic areas and age levels” (Bradley, Danielson & Doolittle, 2007, pg. 10). The characteristics of high schools that make SW-PBIS work in these settings unique are described in a recent monograph (Bohanon-Edmonson , Flannery, Eber & Sugai, 2005). Similar challenges have been noted with the “fit” between RtI and secondary schools (Engeln, 2008). Principals identify challenges associated with the time required and scheduling of team meetings, time required for data analyses, and the additional paperwork associated with this approach. Further, the availability of screening tools at the secondary level is more limited.

These trends are reflected in Montana’s RtI efforts to date. Secondary buildings engaged in this work represent a very small proportion of schools statewide. These are important issues for the leadership team to take on in order to be able to refine and scale up effective practices within district

feeder patterns. As procedures for secondary schools are better mapped out, with consultants trained to implement them, districts in which elementary schools are working on RtI will be encouraged to look at their feeder patterns to extend effective practices to the middle/secondary levels. For the purposes of this initiative, at least one of the 5 schools selected for the braiding pilot project will be at the middle/secondary level. Additionally, with the completion of a secondary RtI implementation guide tied to Objective 1.2, facilitators working with other RtI schools will have resources available to them to place a greater focus on implementation at the secondary level.

Capacity-Building. The plan to braid initiatives has important implications for the work of the facilitators who provide training and on-site support. They will need additional training to work effectively in collaboration with consultants from the other initiative area. Joint training, bringing together both the RtI and MBI consultants, will be provided around the identified areas for braiding (see anticipated overlap areas in Table 16). They will also be introduced to the use of distance approaches that might support their school support efforts, along with guidance about how to “match” technology with support needs. For example, flip video cameras might be used to collect “data” to measure fidelity of intervention or to share successful work within and between network schools. “Bug in the ear” technology might be used for classroom coaching. Not all interactions lend themselves to distance approaches, however, so it will be important to be skilled enough in the use of the tools that informed decisions can be made. A monthly webinar series will be implemented for RtI/MBI consultants to support this capacity-building objective.

A second training initiative will be developed to address the unique information needs of school administrators. This will address the organizational and resource issues that emerge when adopting new models of service delivery to students. To further support administrators, a

technology-based forum will be established to support ongoing networking, problem-solving, and sharing of successes. The format will be refined based on participant feedback, but it is anticipated that monthly webinars focused on administrative issues specific to the braiding initiatives will occur, as well as sessions that address using the data audit tool. An interactive forum will be created to enable administrators to have ongoing threaded discussions, as well as share resources. One approach that will be considered for this is the development of an administrator's wiki site.

**Table 17: Goal 2, Objectives and Measurable Outcomes**

<b>Goal 2 - Support to LEAs.</b> To increase the number of schools in Montana that are implementing evidence-based practices within multi-tiered models, to provide effective academic and behavioral support to all students.	
<b>Goal 2 Objectives</b>	<b>Goal 2 Measurable Outcomes</b>
2.1 To pilot a braiding approach to integrate RtI and PBIS initiatives within a small cadre of Montana schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustained engagement of at least 5 schools in pilot projects starting in Years 2 and 4</li> <li>• Evaluation data gathered and used for decision-making</li> </ul>
2.2 To continue and refine support available to schools adopting a RtI and/or PBIS model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes in level of implementation in schools working on RtI and/or PBIS</li> <li>• Improvement in fidelity of implementation</li> <li>• Expansion of the continuum of interventions teachers can use with fidelity</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement in academic and/or social outcomes, disaggregated by disability</li> </ul>
2.3 To pilot the implementation of models to extend RtI and PBIS approaches to the preschool level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 25 consultants trained to facilitate use of these practices in programs serving young children</li> <li>• Level of engagement/implementation of identified practices in pilot sites.</li> <li>• Documentation of student outcomes in at least 5 programs implementing these approaches.</li> </ul>
2.4 To develop resources and options that support parent engagement in systems of academic and behavior support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources/systems of support that are developed in at least 5 participating schools/year</li> <li>• Level of utilization of resources/supports</li> <li>• Parent satisfaction</li> </ul>
2.5 To use technology-based strategies to increase access to supports to implement multi-tiered systems of student support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of use of technology-based forms to support instructional personnel and facilitators to network, problem-solve, and share information</li> </ul>

A set of activities designed to lead to the identified outcomes is planned for each of the five objectives under Goal 2. Each will be briefly described.

Braiding Initiative. With an anticipated October start-up date for this project, the initial months of the project will be devoted to the resource development activities associated with Objective 1.1. At the same time, strategies to identify districts that would be well positioned for this pilot will be developed. Initial discussions about this issue have already occurred among the team involved in the writing of this proposal, but final decisions have not been made. Given an interest in focusing on improved outcomes for students with disabilities within the context of multi-tiered systems of support, the project's evaluator has built a database to support the identification of schools that stand to benefit from involvement. She has pulled together data at the school level for graduation rate (Indicator 1), dropout rate (Indicator 2), performance on state assessments (Indicator 3), suspension and expulsion (Indicator 4), LRE placement (Indicator 5), and disproportionate representation (Indicators 9 and 10). These data are also linked to each school district's continuous school improvement system. The data will be organized in a variety of ways (e.g., region, school size, feeder school patterns) to support a data-based invitational process. The intent is to identify schools for which the data indicate there is need for improvement based on current results for students with disabilities. The "installation" of integrated multi-tiered systems of academic and behavioral support is seen as a powerful response to identified issues. Further, the selection data will serve as a baseline against which school improvement can be documented over time. Given the big differences between the smallest and largest schools in Montana, the factor of school size will also enter into the invitational/selection process for this pilot, so that we have experience with the model in a variety of contexts.

The plan is to begin a pilot with five schools by the beginning of year 2, adding a second cadre of schools in year 4. This will provide time to document and assess initial adoption and implementation, as well as the gradual movement toward full implementation. Schools will receive small grants to support implementation costs that may not be part of their budget. For example, most schools do not have funds budgeted to pay for access to the School Wide Information System (SWIS) used in the PBIS initiative. They will be able to support these kinds of costs with their grant funding.

Support to RtI/PBIS Networks. As previously described, support to districts implementing RtI and MBI has been organized in phases, moving from awareness and exploration to fuller levels of implementation (See materials in Appendix F). While other state resources will continue to be channeled into awareness level activities for new schools seeking to adopt multi-tiered systems of support, SPDG funded efforts will be focused on that subset of schools that have begun and are committed to the implementation process. This will enable Project REAL to address scaling up supports and issues, since these schools have started what we know requires multiple years of initial implementation before any expansion efforts are possible (Fixsen, et al., 2005). It will also provide project personnel with fidelity and outcome data (see evaluation discussion in Section 8) that can be used to gain important lessons about the ongoing issues of implementation. This information, in turn, will be used to refine activities at the initial stages of model implementation.

As documented in a survey of 166 Montana school administrators (OPI, 2010), there continue to be ongoing training needs among those schools that are “on the path” of implementation.

The priority needs include more training on Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, as well as scaling up



strategies that include the secondary level implementation issues previously discussed. Project REAL will continue to support the delivery of regional training focused on these ongoing needs.

Preschool Initiative. Montana has been involved in a partnership with the Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL) since 2008. As a state who successfully competed to receive technical assistance from this project, Montana receives in-person and distance training to promote the adoption and use of evidence-based early literacy practices. As a result of this support, a network of 40 trainers distributed across the 5 CSPD regions has been formed. CELL has established a web-based system for trainers to submit online data about activities. To date, it is fair to say that these activities are just in their infancy. As an initiative of Project REAL, time for the OPI staff member responsible for 619 services (Danielle McCarthy) will be focused on collaborative efforts to get these materials disseminated and used by families and programs serving young children. She will work in collaboration with the Early Childhood Personnel and Professional Development (ECPPD) group that is advisory to Montana's CELL initiative to develop an implementation plan. Further, Montana's PIRC will be drawn into this initiative to provide an effective mechanism to get Parent Practice Guides into the hands of families. Project REAL will support the purchase of the books for which Practice Guides have been development, creating "literacy kits" that can be checked out by families.

A second effort focused on the needs of young children is tied to the work of the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL). Located at Vanderbilt University, CSEFEL is a five-year project designed to strengthen the capacity of Head Start and child care programs to improve the social and emotional outcomes of young children. In Montana, the Department of Public Health and Human Services has established a contract with the Early

Childhood Project at MSU-Bozeman to conduct CSEFEL training. This is part of a quality improvement initiative focused on child care providers and Head Start programs. Project REAL personnel, with the assistance of the ECPPD group, will explore the emerging information base about the linking of these two initiatives, and will work to create an action plan to connect, if not directly link, these efforts.

Parent Involvement. As mentioned in relation to the Preschool Initiative, parent involvement will be an integral component of an early childhood literacy initiative (i.e., CELL) with the assistance of Montana's PIRC. While a comparable, readily available source of high quality evidence-based practice information is not available for K-12 schools, there are a number of innovative approaches that can be shared with schools to engage families in supporting learning and behavior initiatives.

A partner in this project, Parent's Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK) will be engaged to provide leadership in this area. With expertise in both parent support and technology (See vitae for Roger Holt), they are well positioned to work in collaboration with site facilitators and school personnel to design approaches that "fit" the context. Examples of innovative approaches have been documented in the literature and popular press, including such projects like "A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words" (Church, 2010). Minigrants of \$500 supported the purchase of "education-enhancing extras" not included in the school budget. In this funded project, students use digital cameras to post their happenings on the school website and bulletin board for parents. Similarly, a "digital storytelling" project (Church, 2010) involving the use of small digital recorders, documents first-graders during independent reading. The video allows them to view themselves as readers, a recognized strategy to develop fluency, comprehension, listening and speaking skills. The digital format allows access to

this “view” of the child’s learning to parents when posted on a class webpage. Classroom wikis and podcasts (Richardson, 2010) represent other ways to connect with parents in a way that allows them to access these sites when it is convenient for them. Learning from projects like A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words, we plan to work with PLUK to adopt similarly innovative approaches to parent involvement.

Technology-Based Strategies. While it is hopefully apparent that technology supports have been embedded as a strategy to implement activities across all Project REAL initiatives, an objective focused on this issue will ensure that this aspect of our service delivery receives the scrutiny that is needed to evaluate its effectiveness. The potential benefits of using these strategies to address rural challenges of distance, resources, and expertise are huge, and the initiatives of this project lend themselves to a variety of applications. Technology applications that are anticipated include: web-based training that is archived for future use; use of technology to investigate distance-based technical assistance and coaching; technology supports to gather performance and fidelity data; technology supports to engage parents in academic and social interventions with their children; and technology-based forums to support cross-site networking, communities of practice and peer supports.

**Table 18: Goal 3, Objectives and Measurable Outcomes**

<b>Goal 3 - Low Incidence Support.</b> To provide technical assistance and support to improve access to the general education curriculum for students who need high levels of support.	
<b>Goal 3 Objectives</b>	<b>Goal 3 Measurable Outcomes</b>
3.1 To provide awareness level information and professional development focused on the practice of standards-based instruction for students who perform substantially below grade level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive set of multi-media materials available to teachers online.</li> <li>• Monitor access of online materials (web hits, follow-up e-mails)</li> </ul>
3.2 To provide student-specific coaching to implement standards-based instruction for students who need high levels of support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching focused on standards-based instruction provided in at least two schools/region each year</li> </ul>
3.3 To use technology to capture and share positive exemplars of access to the general education curriculum for students who need high levels of support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At least 3 “case studies” developed each year, with supporting documents and video clips to illustrate strategies and outcomes</li> </ul>

Activities tied to Goal 3 address Competitive Priority 3 - Professional Development for Personnel Who Work with Children Who Need High Levels of Support. Leadership for this strand of activity will be provided by Dr. Gail McGregor at the University of Montana Rural Institute. She will collaborate with OPI personnel responsible for initiatives in the area of autism, other personnel

within the Rural Institute with content expertise in needed areas (e.g., assistive technology, transition, deaf-blindness), and the network of outreach consultants who work for the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind. Goal 3 activities are organized in a manner that reflects the initial stages of adoption reflected in Montana's framework for Professional Development: awareness, followed by deeper understanding and initial implementation.

Disseminate Awareness Information About Student Needs and Best Practices. In the absence of preservice personnel preparation focused on the needs of students with low incidence disabilities, there is considerable variation in the focus and quality of services provided to these students in their home schools. The members of the team involved in this initiative are all in a position to have direct experience with current practices. Their perspectives will be shared, compiled, and organized into a prioritized list of evidence-based practices that will be addressed in this initiative. Feedback about the topics will be gathered from stakeholder groups, including instructional personnel who provide services to students who need high levels of support. Perspectives will also be gathered about the most effective formats and ways to broadly share this foundational information. Strategies to encourage teachers to access the information resources created will include awarding continuing education units, providing options for graduate credit.

It is anticipated that information will be shared in two areas: (a) specific strategies appropriate for student-level intervention (e.g., use of applied behavior analysis methods for systematic instruction; use of assistive technology for instructional and communication supports; literacy approaches for students with low incidence disabilities) ; and (b) universal interventions that create a general education context in which students with low incidence disabilities are able to

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access the general education curriculum (e.g., universal design for learning; differentiated instruction; accessible instructional materials).

Provide Teacher and Student -Level Support to Develop Positive Exemplars. Seeing is believing. The importance of documenting effective use of identified practice is clear. In order to do this, students who need high levels of support will be identified within schools already engaged in efforts to implement multi-tiered systems of academic and behavioral support. Project staff will extend technical assistance and on-site coaching and support to utilize one or more of the evidence-based practices appropriate to provide effective instruction for the identified student(s). Modeling a data-based decision-making approach, baseline levels of performance will be documented. Working collaboratively with instructional personnel, an intervention program will be designed, building in strategies to assess ongoing progress. Teachers will be provided with tools (e.g., digital video cameras) to document the effort in a way that can, with parent permission, be shared with others for instructional purposes. Project staff will be responsible for packaging this information in a way that can be easily shared with a broader audience. This might occur through a wiki site focused on sharing successful applications of evidence-based interventions for students who need high levels of support.

Support More Broad-Based Adoption. Building upon a increasingly larger repertoire of positive examples, personnel tied to this initiative will collaborate with state personnel and the regional consultants to integrate information about successful strategies for students who need high levels of support within the existing training structure for RtI and MBI. Student-specific interventions will be presented as Tier 3 strategies, while responsive general education practices will be shared as Tier 1 approaches.

#### **4.2 Extent to Which Project Design is Appropriate and Will Address Identified Needs.**

Montana's professional development needs were described in great detail in Section 2 of this

proposal. They were then prioritized to identify those areas that would be addressed within the Project REAL workscope. The alignment between these prioritized needs and project plans and methods to address them, is described in Table 19. This relationship can also be seen by reviewing the logic model contained in Figure 3.

**Table 19: Alignment of State Priorities with Project Design Components**

State Priority	Project REAL Component/Design
Improved academic and social outcomes for ALL students, including those who need high levels of specialized supports	Support to adopt evidence-based practices emphasized in RtI and PBIS initiatives; low incidence initiative ensures efforts encompass the full range of students; extending models to address needs of preschool aged students.
Student-centered efforts	All models and practices incorporated in Project REAL are responsive to the needs of individual students; student needs drive the actions taken by instructional personnel.
Data-driven decision-making	The effectiveness of efforts at the state and local levels will be measured formatively and summatively. This information will be used to make decisions.
Strong infrastructure for local support to	Capacity building initiative focused on



State Priority	Project REAL Component/Design
school	strengthening state leadership and the network of consultants who provide support to schools.
Parent engagement and support in the education of their children.	An initiative focused on expanding resources for parent involvement is planned. Design decisions will be made locally; implementation will be supported with Project resources and staff expertise.
Professional development supports accessible to all	Multiple methods and formats will be used to provide professional development, including on-site and distance-approaches to support.

**4.3 Extent to which Proposed Activities Constitute a Coherent, Sustained Program of Training in the Field.** To be successful, professional development “*must focus on the content that teachers teach and the methods they use to teach that content, and it must be sufficiently sustained and linked to daily classroom practice to affect student learning* (Guskey, 2000, pg. x). This sentiment, supported by research discussed in Section 3.1.3 ( e.g., Gersten, Morant & Brengelman, 1995; Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm & Klingner, 1998) has guided the design of the professional development activities of Project REAL. Evidence of the sustained implementation is described relative to each project goal area in Table 20.

**Table 20: Evidence of Sustained Professional Development Practices**

Project Goal	Evidence of Sustained Professional Development
1: Capacity Building	A leadership team is actively engaged in mapping out implementation approaches that are rolled out in phases; reliance upon a field-based network of coaches provides the necessary resources to deliver supports in school and classroom environments across time.
2: Support to LEAs	Didactic training is provided in a phased in manner across a two year period of time; on-site supports are available throughout this period of time. Preschool initiative utilizes an emerging network of trainers to provide implementation support to programs over time. Parent initiative is focused on creating resources and structures for engagement that can grow and evolve over time.
3: Low Incidence Support	Student-specific interventions developed collaboratively with instructional personnel, model effective practices. Skills are acquired that can be applied in other contexts and with other students who need high levels of support.

**4.4 Extent to Which the Project Design Reflects Up-To-Date Knowledge from Research and Effective Practice.** Much time has been spent considering the research base that is as associated with the practices of Project REAL. In previous sections of this proposal, the professional literature

that has informed both the content of the project's professional development initiatives as well as the methods of implementing the initiatives, has been emphasized. The reader is referred back to Sections 3.3 and the summary of the evidence base in Table 13 that is associated with practices planned under each project initiative area.

**4.5 Extent to which the Project will Establish Linkages with Other Appropriate Agencies and Organizations Providing Services to the Target Population.** Implementation of Project REAL involves collaboration with a large network of partners and supportive organizations. The diverse stakeholder groups that have been engaged in the preparation of this project are identified in membership lists contained in Appendix C. In terms of project implementation, many partners will be actively engaged in project initiatives. Organized by initiative area descriptors corresponding to the three project goals, collaborating agencies are highlighted for each initiative in Table 21. Letters of support in Appendix A verify the willingness of these different groups to work on this project.

**Table 21: Linkages with Other Agencies**

Goal	Collaborating Agencies/Partners
1: Capacity-Building	State CSPD; Regional CSPD Consultants; network of coaches drawn from multiple agencies; school administrators from statewide network of schools; IDEA Partnership Project; RtI National Center
2: Support to LEAs (includes preschool/early childhood)	Regional CSPD/RSA; Network of facilitators and coaches; CELL and network of CELL trainers; CSEFEL

	trainers; PLUK; PIRC; Part C Program; Early Childhood Services Bureau
3: Low Incidence Support	UMT Rural Institute; Montana School for the Deaf and Blind; MSDB Outreach Consultants; Montana Deaf-Blind Project; Vocational Rehabilitation (transition-aged students)

**4.6 Extent to which the Proposed Project is Part of a Comprehensive Effort to Improve Teaching and Learning and Support Rigorous Academic Standards for Students.**

The initiatives that comprise the workscope of Project REAL are components of a comprehensive state personnel development plan addressing state and local needs. With involvement of key stakeholder groups, the Project REAL initiatives have been aligned with school improvement and professional development activities funded under ESEA. A report recently prepared (OPI, 2010) to assist the CSPD/RSA regions in their planning, presents a regional breakdown of performance on IDEA-Part B state performance indicators and targets, organized within Correlate Areas based on the Effective Schools Model (Lezotte, 1991). The Effective Schools Framework has been adapted for use in Montana, and adopted by the Title I Program to guide its school improvement efforts. As seen in Table 22, these areas have also been aligned with the essential components of the RtI and MBI models supported by the current State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG). This is intended to send the message to districts that the professional development and school improvement initiatives funded by ESEA and IDEA represent a cohesive set of strategies designed to address the needs of all students. Finally, the inclusion of plans to address Competitive Priority 3 - Addressing

Students Who Need High Levels of Support, ensures that standards-based instruction for the full range of students with disabilities will be encompassed in the work of this project.

**Table 22. Alignment of the MT Correlates, SPP Indicators, and RtI Essential Components**

<b>MT Correlates</b>	<b>Part B SPP Indicators</b>	<b>RtI Essential Components</b>	<b>MBI Key Indicators</b>
<b>Academic Performance</b>			
#1: Curriculum	#5: LRE Placement #6: Preschool Settings #7: Preschool Outcomes	#1: Evidence-based Curriculum & Instruction	
#2: Assessment	#3: Statewide Assessment	#2: Ongoing assessment; #4: Data-based Decision-making	
#3: Instruction	#1: Graduation Rates; #2: Dropout Rates; #4 - Suspension/Expulsion Rates; #5: LRE Placement; #6: Preschool Settings; #13: Secondary Transition w/IEP Goals	#1: Evidence-based C & I ; #4: Data-based Decision-making	#1: Training Process

<b>Learning Environment</b>			
#4: School Culture	#1: Graduation Rates; #2: Dropout Rates; #4 - Suspension/Expulsion Rates	#3: Collaborative Teaming	#4: Proactive Support Systems
#5: Student, Family & Community Support	#5: LRE Placement; #6: Preschool Settings; #8: Parent Involvement; #11: Child Find; #12: Part C to Part B Transition; #14: Post-School Outcomes	#7: Community & Family Involvement	#5: Community Process
#6: Professional Growth, Development, & Evaluation		#6: Ongoing Training & Professional Development	#1: Training Process; #2: Team Process; #3: Evaluation Process
<b>Efficiency</b>			
#7: Leadership	#9: Disproportionate Representation in Special Education; #10:	#8: Strong Leadership	#1: Training Process; #2: Team Process

	Disproportionate Representation in Specific Disability Categories		
	#15: Monitoring, Complaints, Hearings; #16: Written Complaints; #17: Due Process Hearings; #18: Due Process in Resolution; #19: Mediations		
#8: Organizational Structure & Resources			
#9: Comprehensive & Effective Planning	#20: Timeliness of State Reported Data & Reports	#5: Fidelity of Implementation	#3: Evaluation Process

## 5.0 Quality of Project Personnel

In this section, employment practices will be described, followed by a description of project staff from The OPI as well as their collaborating partners and consultants.

### **5.1 Strategies to Encourage Applications for Employment from Underrepresented Groups.**

The state's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Program was established through a Governor's executive order. The Department of Administration works with each state agency to implement and maintain an effective EEO program throughout state government. The EEO policy of the OPI is provided in Table 23. It is notable that the PI for this grant is a person with a disability, and in the last statewide election, Montana selected Denise Juneau, a member of the Mandan and Hidatsa tribes, as State Superintendent of Schools. She is the first American Indian to be elected to statewide executive office in Montana.

**Table 23: EEO Policy of the Montana Office of Public Instruction**

- It is the policy of the OPI to provide equal employment opportunity to all individuals. The OPI does not discriminate on the basis of an individual's race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, handicap, marital status, or political belief with the exception of special programs provided by law.
- The OPI will take affirmative action to equalize employment opportunities at all levels of agency operations where there is evidence that there have been barriers to employment for those classes of people who have traditionally been denied equal employment opportunity.
- The OPI is committed to providing reasonable accommodation to any known disability that may interfere with a disabled applicant's ability to compete in the selection process or a disabled employee's ability to perform the duties of a job.

The OPI will not retaliate against any employee for lawfully opposing any discriminatory practice, including the filing of an internal grievance, the filing of a union grievance, the



initiation of an external administrative or legal proceeding, or testifying in or participating in any of the above. • The designated EEO Officer for the OPI is the personnel officer. The personnel officer attempts to resolve complaints of discrimination. The personnel officer is also responsible for implementation of measures designed to remediate the effects of demonstrable past discrimination within the OPI.

- The OPI cooperates with the State of Montana Personnel Division in determining appropriate affirmative action plan items. A statement assigning responsibility for coordinating the agency affirmative action program and for attempting to resolve employee EEO complaints to a designated EEO officer and assigning responsibility for implementing the affirmative action programs to all agency managers and supervisors shall be posted in each work location.

**5.2 Qualifications and Time Commitments of Key Project Personnel..** Key project personnel within the applicant agency are all part of the Professional Development Unit of the Division of Special Education. Abbreviated vitae for all named personnel are provided in Appendix B. Information provided in Appendix H provides details about the availability of identified staff for the project and all other commitments on federally funded projects.

**Tim Harris** is Principal Investigator of this grant. As the Director of the Division of Special Education, his leadership in this project is critical to its success. While relatively new to the position of Director, Tim has worked at OPI for 16 years. He spent 9 of those years working as the Early Assistance Program Manager, mediating disputes between school districts and families. As a result, he is a well known and respected person among families and school personnel. Prior to working at

the OPI, he served as the assistant director of an Independent Living Center in Helena, demonstrating the strong connections that he maintains with the disability community in this state. The time Tim devotes to this effort will not be supported with project funds. His anticipated level of involvement is .10 FTE, but this will change if needed.

**Susan Bailey-Anderson** is currently the Project Director for Montana's currently funded State Personnel Development Grant. She will continue in that same capacity for Project REAL. As head of the Professional Development Unit within the Division of Special Education at the OPI, she oversees all state training initiatives, including the coordination of the work of the five CSPD regions. Susan has worked at the OPI since 1987. Like Tim Harris, her familiarity with all aspects of the special education service system in the state is unmatched. Further, they both are held in high regard by practitioners across the state. In reference to the three strategies that are part of the systems change model described in section three (Fiore et al., 2010), these two leaders are in the perfect position to use their influence and authority to yield accountable project outcomes.

**Nikki Sandve** will serve as the Coordinator of Project REAL. She serves in the same capacity for the currently funded SPDG. Nikki has worked at the OPI for 10 years in several capacities. She has considerable training and expertise in the area of professional development, and has been key in moving Montana's practices forward to embrace effective professional development strategies. She has well-established relationships with the CSPD regional network, and has worked with them to establish data collection systems to support feedback loops from the local level to the regional and state levels. Nikki has been responsible for working closely with the project evaluator to gather performance data that are summarized annually. Her skills and experience will ensure a quick start-up of this project as well as a conscientious implementation of its design.

**Lori Brown-Chauvet.** is the RtI Coordinator within the Professional Development Unit. She is the newest member of the team, having recently left a school administrator position in Wyoming to begin this work. In addition to her administrative experience, she has been both a special and general educator as well as a preschool teacher. Her well-rounded school experience is grounded in professional training and credentialing as a teacher and administrator. Lori will work full time coordinating the RtI activities of Project REAL.

**Danielle McCarthy** is a new 619 Coordinator at OPI. Prior to starting this position in December of 2009, she worked as a compliance monitor and 619 coordinator for a school district in Idaho. With experience as a special educator, her academic training includes training as a teacher and certification as a school administrator. She is currently a part time doctoral student. As the state's 619 Coordinator, Danielle is in a strong position to provide leadership to the early childhood initiatives built into this project. Grant funding will support .25 FTE of her time for these activities.

**Floy Scott** is a Research and Analysis Specialist at OPI. She has been employed there since 1991, working in various positions related to the collection and analysis of special education data. She received her master's degree in sociology in 2007, while continuing to work half time at OPI and working as a teaching assistant for courses in statistics and research methods. Floy is knowledgeable about both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, and has experience serving as the evaluator on two previous OSEP grants. She returned to full time employment at OPI after finishing her master's degree, and is the individual within the Division of Special Education responsible for generating the data for the APR for the SPP. She is uniquely positioned to collect, access and interpret state agency level data, as well as project-specific data that are described in Section 8. Floy will devote 1.00 FTE to this project.

**Karen Jeschke** provides administrative support for the current State Personnel Development Grant. She will continue in this capacity for Project REAL. Her experience within the Division is critical to the administrative support of the multiple people and initiatives included in the workscope of this project. She will devote full time to providing support to the entire OPI team working on Project REAL.

**5.3 Qualifications of Project Consultants and Subcontractors.** Subcontracts for project activities will be established with The University of Montana Rural Institute (Low Incidence Support), Parent's Let's Unite for Kids (Parent support activities), the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind, and the Montana Parent Information Center. The qualifications of the individuals within these organizations responsible for the identified initiatives are highlighted below. Vitae are provided in Appendix B.

**Dr. Gail McGregor**, from The University of Montana's Rural Institute, will oversee the initiative to increase access to the general education curriculum for students who need high levels of support. In that capacity, she will serve as the link to personnel from the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind as well as other personnel within the Rural Institute at The University of Montana who have expertise in evidence-based practices for students with low incidence disabilities.

Dr. McGregor is a Research Professor at the University of Montana and Director of the Montana Deaf-Blind Project. She is involved in teaching, service and demonstration projects, and has been a collaborative partner on federally funded projects with OPI for over 15 years. Trained in the area of low incidence disabilities, she has considerable experience delivering school and student level technical assistance, and is well positioned to coordinate the various partners whose involvement is essential to the success of the Low Incidence Support initiative. She will devote .25 FTE to this initiative across the five years.

**MSDB Outreach Consultants.** An Outreach Program of the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind employs 13 consultants with expertise in the areas of deaf/hard of hearing or visual impairments. Table 24 identifies these individuals and their area of expertise. Each of these individuals is highly trained in their area of expertise, serving as technical assistance providers to personnel serving students with sensory disabilities in local schools. The specific consultants that will get involved in student-level support activities will be determined based on the location of the schools/students identified for participation in this strand of activities. As indicated in a letter from Superintendent Steve Gettel, MSDB is committed to this project, and will provide the administrative support necessary to enable consultants to work collaboratively as members of student support teams.

**Table 24: MSDB Outreach Consultants**

<b>Deaf/Hard of Hearing Outreach Consultants</b>	<b>Vision Outreach Consultants</b>
Carmel Collum	Pam Boespflug
Emily LaSalle	Nancy Getten
Lisa Cannon	Jane Nybo
Sarah Eyer	Ken McCullough
Sandy McGennis	Keri Norick
	Steve Fugate
	Sharon Woods

**Roger Holt** is the Executive Director of PLUK, the OSEP-funded parent training and information center in Montana. While he assumed the position of Executive Director just two years ago, he has worked there for twenty years. Previously (and currently), he has guided PLUK's efforts to use technology both as a support for the daily working of the agency, and as a strategy to support parents, schools, and individual students. They are the "one stop" source of information about professional development in the state, sending electronic updates to a huge database of parents and practitioners. As illustrated in the photo on his vitae (see Appendix B), Roger is a true "techie", and will be a guiding force in the implementation of the initiative to work collaboratively with schools to develop technology-supported resources to engage parents in classroom and school activities. He will devote approximately .10 FTE to this project across the period of funding.

**CSPD Regional Councils.** Subcontracts will be given to each of the 5 regional CSPD Councils to support their efforts to coordinate, deliver, and evaluate training and on-site support to schools engaged in project initiatives within their region.

**Network of Coaches/Facilitators.** The regional consultants and facilitators working with the RtI and MBI initiative are an experienced group of educators who have enough flexibility in their schedules that they can commit to this work. They are retired teachers and administrators, or currently employed teachers who can take time to serve in this capacity. Most of the consultants have been working in this capacity for years, having received training over a period of five years. Expanding RtI and PBIS initiatives will require recruiting and training additional coaches/facilitators. The job description for these position is contained in Appendix F.

**Fiona Helsel**, a Senior Research Analyst, is the CELL technical assistance liaison for Montana. She is employed by the American Institute for Research, one of 4 partner groups that staff the CELL project. As one of six states selected to receive technical assistance from CELL, her involvement in this role is supported by CELL funding. As indicated in her letter of support, she will continue to support Montana's efforts to adopt CELL practices in programs serving young children and their families.

**The Montana Parent Information and Resource Center** is a community-based agency with a mission to bring parents, educators, and those working with families the information, training, and support to help children get read for and succeed in school. Their activities focus on early learning, kindergarten readiness, parent leadership, and school-family-community partnerships. In Project REAL, they will support the preschool initiative focused on the state's involvement in the CELL project. Jennifer Calder is the identified liaison from PIRC for the CELL project. She is a Program Coordinator at PIRC, with experience in early childhood as well as K-12 education.

**Dr. Joanne Cashman** is the Director of and Montana's liaison to a federally funded initiative of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), IDEA

Partnerships. The “partnership” is an affiliation of 55 national organizations supporting the shared implementation of IDEA. Dr. Cashman is engaged with Montana in a Partnership Initiative focused on RtI, working on establishing a community of practice to support the implementation of these practices within Montana, as well as nationally. While her technical assistance is provided to Montana at no cost to the project, these efforts are an important piece of the network of supports for RtI in the state.

## **6.0 Adequacy of Resources**

The resources that the applicant and its collaborators bring to this project are highlighted in this section. Commitments to engage in the work, as well as a discussion of the cost-effectiveness of the project, is also presented.

**6.1 Adequacy of Support from the Applicant Organization.** As an integral part of the work of the Professional Development Unit in the Division of Special Education, the full resources of the OPI are available to support this project. Basic project supports include: accessible facilities for offices, meetings, workshops, and conferences; webinar resources (e.g., Adobe Connect); fully furnished office space for project personnel; IBM-compatible desktop and laptop computers for use when staff travel; technical supports from the agency IT personnel; toll-free telephone access and TDD access; high-quality copying equipment and printing services; and distance telephone conference capabilities. Perhaps the greatest resource that OPI has readily available for this project is the established relationships with other entities concerned with the education of children and youth and their families, both within and outside of the state agency. Montana's CSPD is the infrastructure which facilitates these ongoing relationships.



CSPD State and Regional Councils. CSPD in Montana is a two-tiered system, with a state council comprised of virtually all stakeholders in the education of children and youth with disabilities (see membership list in Appendix C), and regional councils with similarly diverse representation from the CSPD region. With some fiscal support from OPI, the regional councils do an extraordinary amount of work to coordinate professional development initiatives that are aligned with state priorities and also responsive to needs of schools within their regions. The design of this system is very effective in Montana, since there is no other professional development infrastructure as that which exists in more populated and well-resourced states (e.g., BOCES, Intermediate Units).

Higher Education Consortium. An offshoot of the state CSPD Council, the Higher Education Consortium is comprised of faculty from every college and university in the state that is involved in teacher preparation. OPI supports meetings of this group twice a year, and participates in these meetings to exchange information about current state initiatives and priorities that have significance for the preparation of teachers in Montana. It is unique to this state that this level of interaction has been sustained over a period of many years. The ongoing relationship with this group and between group members will be critical to efforts addressing professional development concerns at the preservice level, as well as issues impacting teachers already in the field.

**6.2 Relevance and Demonstrated Commitment of Each Project Partner.** The resources of project partners and subcontractors will be available to support the initiatives the comprise Project REAL. They include the University of Montana Rural Institute, PLUK, PIRC, and MSDB. Further, the expressed commitment of these partners, as well as those whose efforts are supported with other sources of funding, is confirmed in letters of support from each organization. Letters of commitment can be found in Appendix A from the University of Montana Rural Institute, PLUK, the Montana

School for the Deaf and Blind, Montana PIRC, CELL, and NASDE (IDEA partnerships). Finally, discussion of the relevance of their involvement has been threaded throughout the project design section as well as in the Quality of Project Personnel and Subcontractors.

**6.3 Extent to which Budget is Adequate to Support Proposed Project..** A detailed description of the costs of this project is provided in the Budget Narrative section of this proposal. The budget has been thoughtfully put together to support the initiatives described in this proposal, and is adequate for the activities that are planned. The budget was developed with an expectation of level funding.

**6.4 Extent to which Costs are Reasonable.** In Montana, professional development resources are limited. As a result, they are used wisely. The demographics of the state necessitate large travel budgets, despite the fact that technology supports will be used to the extent possible to help personnel work efficiently. The training resources that will be developed with grant funds are investments for much broader use, as Montana continues to look toward scaling up multi-tiered systems of support. The OPI is committed to supplement grant dollars with discretionary funds to expand professional development initiatives. These strategies and commitments underscore the cost-effectiveness of Project REAL.

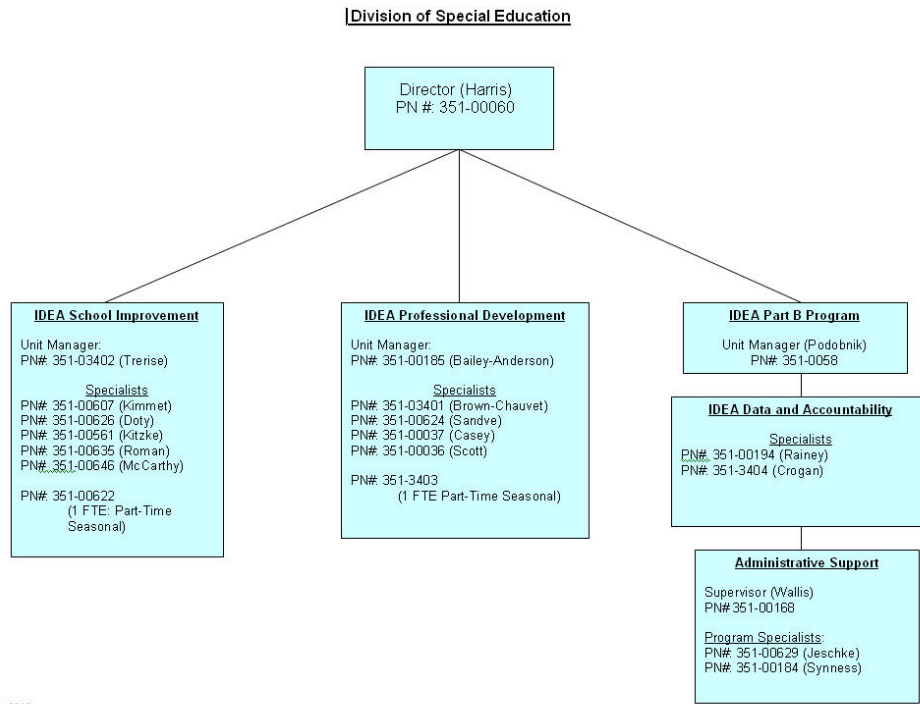
**6.5 Potential for Continued Support.** Montana is committed to the initiatives that are part of Project REAL. While grant funds are critical to the success of the activities encompassed in this proposal, the state has and will continue to support initiative areas that are part of this workscope. Furthermore, the state will continue to look to national technical assistance groups and other federally funded projects to gain access to quality supports and services that will enhance Montana's efforts to improve outcomes for all students.

## **7.0 Quality of the Management Plan**

In this section, the organization and general operating procedures of the project are described. This includes the planned approach to management and monitoring of project activities, and the distribution of responsibilities across project staff members and subcontractors. Finally, strategies to ensure broad-based input that assures attention to a diversity of perspectives about project activities are also identified.

**7.1 Adequacy of Management Plan to Achieve Objectives on Time and Within Budget.** This project is located within the Division of Special Education in the Office of Public Instruction. An organizational chart of this unit is provided in Figure 5. The state's director of special education, Tim Harris, is the principal investigator of this project. The Director, Susan Bailey-Anderson, is the Manager of the IDEA Professional Development Unit. Other named project staff from the state agency work in this unit, and are supervised by Susan.

A project leadership team will be formed, consisting of SEA personnel and subcontractors who are assuming leadership for the initiative areas of this proposal. This team will consist of Susan Bailey Anderson (lead - capacity building); Lori Brown-Chauvet (lead - support to LEAs), Gail McGregor (lead - low incidence support) as well as the project evaluator (Scott) and Project Coordinator (Sandve). This team will meet monthly to review progress on initiatives, and create the opportunity for work to be shared and integrated across initiative areas. A videoconference system of the Rural Institute (i.e., Nefsis) that supports a shared whiteboard and other collaborative tools are available for these meetings, enabling team members in multiple sites to view and collaborate on documents.



**Figure 5: Organizational Chart of the OPI Division of Special Education**

Each initiative leader will be responsible for preparing a detailed work plan that operationalizes the general framework and timelines included in this proposal in Appendix I. The workplan will establish performance targets and timelines that will, in turn, be reviewed by the

entire team. Plans within each initiative area will be organized by project objective. Opportunities for the initiatives to capitalize on activities in the other areas will be identified through this review and regular communication. Furthermore, this workplan format will reflect the use of a structured approach to project management based on Hinrichs and Taylor's (1969) Planning-programming-Budgeting System (PPBS) to monitor project accomplishments and expenditures. The only enhancement of this basic system will be the use of a web-based platform, such as google docs or Boot Camp, that can be accessed by all project staff, to store and access documents.

Each initiative will have an implementation team, working under the direction of the Initiative Leader. The team members for each are identified in Table 25. The project evaluator (Scott) will be considered a member of each team, but will work out her method of engagement in the initiatives with the Initiative Leader.

**Table 25: Project Initiatives and Associated Team Members**

<b>1: Capacity Building</b>	<b>2: Support to LEAS</b>	<b>3: Low Incidence Support</b>
Susan-Bailey Anderson	Lori Brown-Chauvet	Gail McGregor
Lori Brown-Chauvet	Susan Bailey-Anderson	MSDB Outreach
Nikki Sandve	Nikki Sandve	[Scott]
Regional consultant rep	Roger Holt	
[Scott]	PIRC	
	[Scott]	

**7.2 Strategies to Ensure Diversity of Perspectives in Operation of Proposed Project.** The same strategies used to ensure stakeholder input into the design of this project will be used to continue the ongoing dialogue of these efforts during the period of funding. There are regularly scheduled opportunities to interact with each of the stakeholder groups identified in Appendix C: quarterly meetings of the state CSPD Council, Special Education Advisory Council, Family and Child Services advisory council, and Early Childhood Personnel and Professional Development Committee. Monthly conference calls are held with the regional CSPD personnel. Given the broad representation within each of these groups, diverse perspectives will shape the work of the Project.

## **8.0. Quality of the Project Evaluation**

Patton (1986) describes program evaluation as *“the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs for use by specific people to reduce uncertainties, improve effectiveness, and make decisions with regard to what those programs are doing and effecting* (pg. 14). To this description, the notion of accountability is added. Collectively, these are the intended outcomes of project evaluation activities.

As described in the Personnel section, the project has a full time evaluator (Floy Scott) who is a data analyst within the Division of Special Education at OPI. Ms. Scott is well versed in both qualitative and quantitative research methodology. Further, she has access to all state level databases, a situation that can be problematic for evaluators who are not employees of the state agency. As the person who developed the methods and databases for use in the calculation and analysis of data submitted to OSEP for Montana's APR, Floy has intimate knowledge of data

maintained by the state agency. This expertise will be invaluable in examining the work of this project.

In the remainder of this section, the methods planned to gather data for decisionmaking, accountability, and the evaluation of project outcomes are described.

**8.1 Extent to Which the Evaluation Methods are Thorough, Feasible, and Appropriate.** The design of this project evaluation is guided by Guskey's (2000) tiered model of evaluating professional development, capturing the shift from exposure and acquisition of new knowledge, to the use and application of new skills. This model, and examples of questions appropriate for each level, is presented in Table 26.

**Table 26: Guskey's (2000) Professional Development Evaluation Model** (pp. 79-81)

Evaluation Level	Examples of Questions Addressed
1. Participant reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Did they like it?</li><li>• What their time well spent?</li><li>• Will it be useful?</li><li>• Was the leader knowledgeable and helpful?</li></ul>
2. Participant learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Did the participants acquire the intended knowledge and skills?</li></ul>
3. Organizational support and change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What was the impact on the organization?</li><li>• Was implementation advocated, facilitated, and supported?</li><li>• Was the support public and overt?</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were problems addressed quickly and efficiently?</li> <li>• Were sufficient resources made available?</li> <li>• Were successes recognized and shared?</li> </ul>
4. Participant's use of new knowledge & skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Did participants effectively apply the new knowledge and skills?</li> </ul>
5. Student learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was the impact on students?</li> <li>• Did it affect student performance or achievement?</li> <li>• Did it influence students' physical or emotional well being?</li> <li>• Are students more confident as learners?</li> </ul>

The last tier of Guskey's model is the ultimate indicator of success. Toward that end, evaluation of schoolwide initiatives will consistently disaggregate results for students with disabilities, ensuring that efforts are critically examined in terms of their impact on ALL students.

Other strategies for evaluation have been drawn from the published work of those actively engaged in implementing and evaluating outcomes associated with multi-tiered systems of behavioral and academic support (e.g., Childs, Kincaid & George, 2010; Frey et al., 2010; Horner et al., 2004; Shapiro & Clemens, 2009; Spaulding et al., 2010 VanDerHayden et al., 2007).` This information has led to the development on an initial evaluation plan that aligns objectives, evaluative questions, and performance measures. Due to space limitations, the plan is located in Appendix J. It will be further refined by the evaluator and leadership team as the initiative plans are fine tuned. A review of the information in this table indicates a mix of quantitative and qualitative outcome data. For each project objective, data will be collected from multiple sources to create as complete a



picture about the effectiveness of project activities as possible. Similarly, data collection plans address an interest in ensuring that project effectiveness is viewed from multiple perspectives. Finally, repeated measurement schedules will enable impact to be assessed over time, both formatively and summatively.

In addition to the process and outcome measurement that is detailed in Appendix J, the project will collect data that will allow for reporting relative to the performance measures established by OSEP for these funded projects. The alignment between these measures and project Objectives is described in Table 27.

**Table 27: Alignment of OSEP Performance Measures with Project Objectives**

<b>Performance Measure</b>	<b>Initiatives/Objectives Upon Which Data Will be Based</b>
1. % of personnel receiving PD through the SPDG Program based on scientific- or evidence-based instructional practices.	Capacity Building: 1.3, 1.4 Support to LEAs: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 Low Incidence Initiative: 3.1, 3.2
2. % of SPDG projects that have implemented PD/training activities that are aligned with improvement strategies identified in their SPP.	Capacity Building: 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 Support to LEAs: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4 Low Incidence Initiative: 3.1, 3.2
3. % of PD/training activities provided through the SPDG program based on evidence-based instructional/behavioral practices.	Capacity Building: 1.3, 1.4 Support to LEAs: 2.1, 2.1, 2.3 Low Incidence Initiative:

4. % of professional development/training activities based on evidence-based instructional/behavioral practices that are sustained through ongoing and comprehensive practices	Capacity Building: 1.3, 1.4 Support to LEAs: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 Low Incidence Initiative: 3.2
5. % of highly qualified special education teachers	NA - teacher retention not a goal of this project
6. % of SPDG projects that successfully replicate the use of scientific or evidence-based instructional/behavioral practices in schools.	Capacity Building: 1.3, 1.4 Support to LEAs: 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 Low Incidence Initiative: 3.2
7. % of projects whose cost per personnel receiving professional development on evidence-based practices is within a specified range.	All project objectives will need to be considered for this performance measure; awaiting further OSEP guidance about this measure.

## 8.2 Extent to which Evaluation Methods Target Effectiveness of Project Implementation

**Strategies.** As detailed in the table in Appendix J, the evaluation plan measured effectiveness relative to a variety of outcome measures. In initiative 1 (capacity building), effectiveness is measured in terms of process measures (i.e., completion of products that will be used to support implementation of tiered systems of support) as well as outcomes of capacity building initiatives focused on coaches and school administrators. In initiative 2, encompassing the implementation of

systems of supports, data to measure changes in student performance (academic/behavioral); level and fidelity of implementation of the multi-tiered support models, and usefulness and level of materials developed for project activities will be gathered. In addition, parent satisfaction with and use of resources developed with project funds, as well as the impact of the use of technology supports to work effectively and efficiently, will be examined. In the final initiative, student-level change data will be gathered. Given the focus of this initiative on increasing access to and performance in the general education curriculum, data reflecting student opportunities (e.g., schedules, IEP) and performance will be gathered. As mentioned previously, project evaluation will examine what outcomes are experienced by students with disabilities within the context of the larger schoolwide initiatives.

**8.3 Extent to Which Evaluation Methods Include Use of Objective Performance Measures Clearly Aligned to Intended Outcomes.** The measurable outcomes associated with each Project goal and objectives (describes in Tables 15, 17, and 18) have been built into the evaluation plan included in Appendix J. For the RtI and PBIS initiatives, there are recognized tools that have been widely used that will, similarly, be used in Project REAL. Samples of these tools are provided in Appendix G. They are instruments that will result in the collection of quantifiable data that are aligned with project performance measures.

**8.4 Extent to Which Evaluation Methods will Provide Performance Feedback and Permit Periodic Assessment of Progress.** The three tiers represented by the project's objectives (state level oversight; support for local implementation; student level initiatives) creates a cascading system of support, in which performance and outcome data from each level of implementation will be channeled to the others levels to inform decisions. For instance, barriers to accessing the general

education curriculum for students with low incidence disabilities are issues that must be addressed by school implementation teams (Goal 2) as well as school leaders (Goal 3). Similarly, issues and barriers emerging in scale-up efforts relative to RtI and PBIS (Goal 2) need to be identified in order to develop responses/supports at the state level (Goal 1). Within this context, data will be used formatively to guide the implementation of project activities.

Collectively, the strategies detailed in this section and Appendix J represent a comprehensive approach to gathering information that will inform project processes and document project outcomes.